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CHRISTIANCOURIER



Ron Sider on confronting injustice, tithing 25 percent and his June retirement

Q+A with author of *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*

Angela Reitsma Bick

CC: You've updated your most famous book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, five times. How does it feel to revisit the statistics with each edition? Is progress being made towards economic equality?



Sider: Yes, quite substantial progress. The number of chronically malnourished people in 1970 was about 35 percent in de-

veloping nations, and today it's down to about 18 percent. That's a major change. We've had more improvements in health care in the last fifty years than in all of human history before. The number of inoculations for basic childhood diseases that we take for granted in developed countries was very low 30 years ago, maybe 20 percent, and now it's 80 percent, so yes, we've made real progress.

There are still 35,000 kids who die of starvation and malnutrition from diseases we know how to prevent, every day. And one billion people are trying to survive on a dollar a day, and two billion on two dollars a day. So there are still lots of problems, and lots of desperate people, but the good news is that we can mark progress.

Speaking of "good news," how do you balance charity with seeking justice?

It's easy for wealthy western Christians to get the point about charity. People are hungry and starving; there's been an earthquake; we're supposed to help and make sure they don't starve. I think that people often get that it's better, as much as possible, to help them feed themselves rather than provide handouts, which creates long-term dependency.

I think the harder part is to understand the structural basis of a lot of poverty. In India, you have a million and a half untouchables. The bottom of society, desperately poor, and they're told that they're there because of actions in a previous life. One needs to preach a Biblical worldview as well as confront structural injustice.

Can you apply clearly Biblical principles when the majority of the world is not Christian?

The answer is yes and no. I think that God's law is written on people's hearts, and that what the Bible tells us is right and wrong is true everywhere. But it's also true that sinful people don't fully understand what the Bible means, so it's not that easy to convince people of other religions or no religion that Biblical truths are in fact right. But I think that one can



Meeting face-to-face with hurting people regularly would transform us, Sider says.

state fundamental, ethical Biblical norms and it will make some kind of inner sense to people everywhere.

What do you see as the relationship between social justice and evangelism?

They're not the same thing. One is inviting individuals who do not confess Christ to accept the gospel, accept salvation and join a new community. That's not an identical activity with working to change structures of injustice or doing community development. But I think they inter-relate in all kinds of ways. You can't follow Jesus' example and not do both. He cared about the whole person: he preached and he healed.

In fact, if broken people have made bad choices, often that contributes to poverty. So coming to Christ, being transformed and developing a new set of values will

See Ron Sider on p. 2

Budget season in Canada

Mike Wevers

Governments across Canada are delivering budget documents that lay out their spending plans for the next fiscal year and provide targets for the ensuing few years. While you can listen to political commitments, the best way to understand the government's agenda is to look at its spending plans. Knowing that, our leaders do not necessarily go out of their way to make it easy. Here's a brief Budget 101 to help with some basics.

The 2013 Federal Budget reflects a *status quo* approach. It sets the parameters for continuing to eliminate the federal deficit, intending to do so prior to the next election. Canada continues to make considerably more progress on this front than the United States. It is also way ahead of many European states, as dramatized recently by the little nation state of Cyprus. One weak European state may yet start the domino effect that will put the whole Eurozone and



Premier Redford's 2013 budget keeps day-to-day spending level, but a revenue shortfall means \$2 billion deficit.

its currency into jeopardy.

This means that budget watchers, including bond-rating companies, observe each government's spending plans with great interest. Governments may try to obfuscate the data and make it more difficult for us to know how much is changing, but it's much more difficult to hide from bond raters.

Alberta – A case in point

For many years the Alberta government prided itself in releasing

Sider on federal budgets

Ron Sider, 73, still calls rich Christians to pay attention to politics and to pursue economic equality. See page 9 for a review of his new book, *Fixing the Moral Deficit*.

one of the most transparent budgets in the country. This is a legacy of the Klein government, which realized that being open about spending would help get support for eliminating a \$22 billion debt. Successive administrations kept that financial transparency.

In its 2013 Budget: *Responsible Change*, Premier Redford's Alberta government has dismissed that legacy. It has done away with one spending plan and replaced it

See Budget on p. 2

News

Ron Sider *continued*

be one part of what can help people get out of poverty. The other part is that there are bad structures, like economic structures, that prevent people from getting a decent living even when they're acting responsibly – so you need both: evangelism can teach persons and social action can change unfair structures.

You have always urged Christians to live more simply. Does that really help the poor?

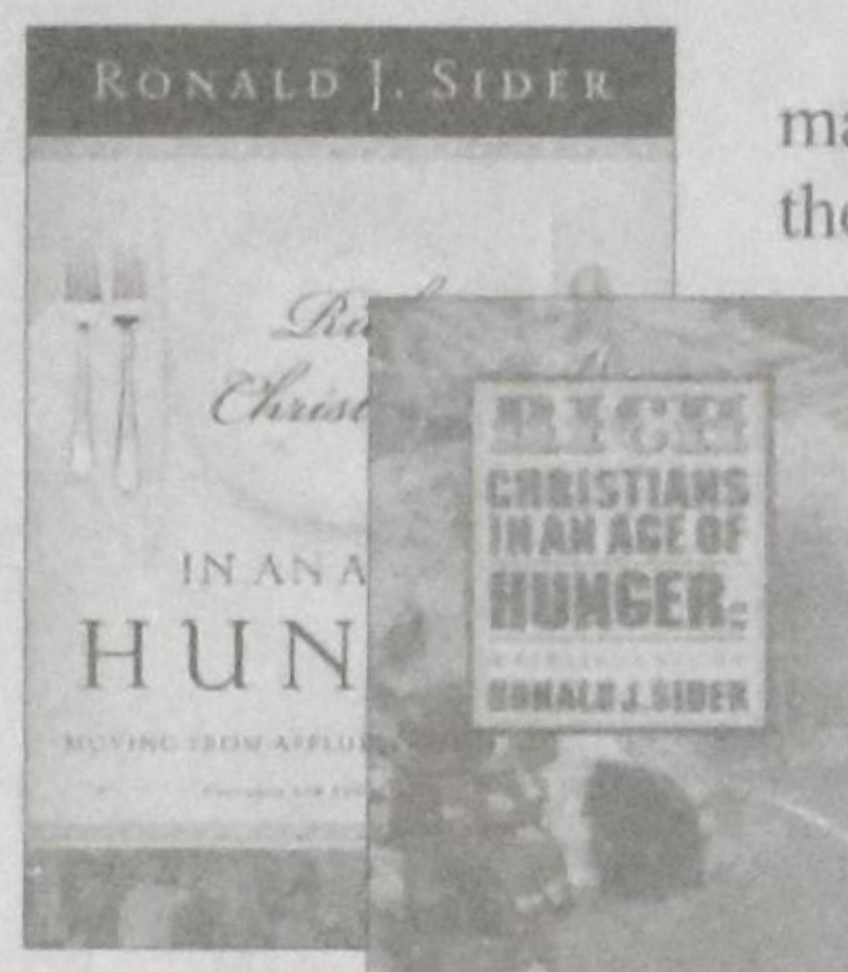
No, not if you just sock all the money away in the bank. But if you spend less on cars and houses and clothes, and give more of your money to programs that effectively empower poor people, then that definitely helps the poor. And I think that Canadians and Americans, most of us, can give 15 to 20 to 25 percent of our income and still not be close to poverty.

Several of your books describe advertising as "demonic." What do you think of Christian organizations that use marketing strategies to get us to donate?

I think it depends on whether or not they are truthful and respectful. Advertising in itself is not evil. Providing information to more people about products that are worthwhile is perfectly fine. If Christians are trying to persuade people to give to good causes by using dishonest advertising or advertising that belittles needy people, then that's not good at all.

You describe churches as "comfortable clubs of conformity." How can we avoid getting to that point?

Well, some combination of listening to what the Bible says about God's concerns for the poor, his demands for justice and his demands that his people take part, and experiential encounters with hurting people. I wish Christians would regularly volunteer an hour or two a week and meet face to face with hurting people. That combination should transform us.



Do your Canadian roots still influence you?

I like to think that they do. For example, the kind of wide-spread acknowledgement of nationalism that you get in many Evangelical circles here in the U.S. is something that my Canadian upbringing protects me against. Growing up on a farm without a lot of wealth certainly gave me a kind of appreciation for people who were at the lower end of the scale.

Are Christians leaders speaking prophetically about poverty today? Who has inherited your mantle?

I don't know that I have any mantle to pass on, but I think that there are significant numbers of folks, anyone from Rick Warren – who talks about God's concern for the poor in a way that leading Evangelical voices never did before; Hybels at Willow Creek; younger people like Shane Claiborne, passion-

2 News Q's

CC: Were you sympathetic with the Occupy movement?

Sider: Yes indeed. I didn't think they went on in any kind of adequately sophisticated way to spell out concrete next steps, but basically their concern was that American society is dreadfully unequal in terms of income and wealth, and they were right.

Where do you stand on Obamacare?

It's not perfect legislation, but it's a major improvement. It will bring, when implemented, 32 million more people into health insurance, and that's enormous progress.

ate about the poor. My colleagues at Evangelicals for Social Action – Paul Alexander and Al Tiescon – are both wonderful young leaders that get it in their bones. They will be taking over as co-presidents at Evangelicals for Social Action when I retire in June.

Does that mean they need two people to do the work you've been doing?

I wouldn't say that. It's a reflection of the collaborative atmosphere of our time.

Budget *continued*

with three: an Operational Plan, which will be balanced by 2014; a Capital Plan, which will be primarily debt financed; and a Savings Plan, which will receive revenue over time based on fiscal results.

The "bottom line" – central in previous budgets revealing the province's fiscal position, deficit and debt – is gone. As a result, opposition parties and media have taken to developing their own deficit projection, ranging from \$2 to \$5.5 billion. The \$17 billion Sustainability Account, which covered recent years' revenue shortages, will be exhausted this year. It comes as little surprise that the government, having promised to balance the budget, has changed its budgeting format to at least balance the Operational Plan. Checking some of Alberta's budget details unveils more of its strategy.

Healthcare spending pressures linger



For most government-funded services, the budget equation is simply a price/volume consideration. As the cost goes up and the number of users increases, the budget should go up. However, in periods of restraint, governments often don't provide enough associated funding. So program managers must make unpopular decisions, particularly when they can't control all costs. Canada has kept inflation under control, but a two percent Consumer Price Index increase can still be significant to program managers. For example, applying it to the \$10.2 billion Alberta Health Services (AHS) base means you would need a \$200 million increase "just to keep pace with inflation." While the 2013 Budget gives AHS a three percent increase, which seems like it would

give health system managers sufficient funding, it ignores the other part of the budget equation – volume. Budget 2013 predicts a two percent increase in population. Furthermore, health care providers are quick to point out that the simple population increase understates the added stress factor of an ageing population.

Attacking the Doctors

Through previous agreements, Alberta purposely agreed to make its doctors the best paid in Canada. The strategy was twofold: to reduce waiting lists for medical procedures by increasing doctors supply, and secondly to develop the Alberta health system into one of the best in Canada by attracting the top grads and physicians available. Alberta built some of the best facilities in the country (the Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute in Edmonton, for example, and the McCaig Institute for Bone and Joint Health in Calgary) and wanted to staff them with the best practitioners. The strategy was successful, as Alberta has seen over a 22 percent increase in physicians over the last five years.

However, the Minister of Health has now directed members of the Alberta Medical Association not only to accept a frozen budget, but also to find \$275 million in savings to fund some of the anticipated increase in services required by Albertans, including new physicians. The AMA is considering options to respond in what is becoming a very nasty negotiation. Despite the wealth of their province, Albertans have not been immune to long waiting lists, particularly for elective procedures. In fact, Premier Redford recently stated that she waited a year for a doctor's appointment to check deafness in one ear. It's delusional for the provincial government to think budgets can be effectively reduced (not covering price and volume) and expect service delivery to improve. With these bud-



University students protest recent budget cuts, including to King's.

get actions, waiting lists for health services in Alberta will undisputedly grow.

Surprise attack

Alberta has long supported a widely accessible post-secondary system, funding 26 institutions across the province, including the King's University College in Edmonton. On budget day, these institutions got the grim news that their operating grants would be reduced by 6.8 percent, or \$147 million. The institutions have been given very little time to adjust and bring spending in line, and that will directly affect the upcoming 2013-14 school year. The Enterprise and Advanced Education Minister has encouraged the institutions to eliminate program duplication and seek out efficiencies. Mandate letters are also going to be delivered to each institution outlining what the Government expects them to deliver. Not surprisingly, university heads and faculty see the budget cuts and upcoming mandate letters as a direct attack on their independence. The battle over these cuts has just begun.

Attack on child poverty over?

John Kolkman, Research Director for the Edmonton Social Planning Council, participated in a post-budget review panel and expressed his concern about Redford's election promise to end child poverty in Alberta in five years. The Alberta Government just released a

Social Policy Framework in February, which reflected a significant amount of community input and solid direction in dealing with poverty issues. Although the Ministry of Human Services budget was not reduced, some programs were eliminated and little was added to make progress on the election commitment.

Alberta's revenue

The Government has made much of its decreased natural resource revenue because of its inability to get bitumen to market at a higher price. The 2013 Fiscal Plan notes that Alberta would generate an additional \$10 billion in revenue if it adopted the taxation structure of the next least-taxed province (British Columbia) and a staggering \$20 billion if it used the highest (Quebec). No one in Alberta would suggest even moving to the B.C. amount. However, many Albertans would welcome tax changes, possibly including a value-added tax (never a sales tax in Alberta!) to reverse the cuts, provide health funding to reduce waiting lists, and make advances in eliminating child poverty. Indeed, Alberta's Budget 2013 could be the catalyst which moves Albertans to more significant taxation reform.

When bond raters do decipher Alberta's spending plans, it is doubtful that it will seriously affect the province's triple A credit rating. Its economic prospects remain strong. What is striking is that Alberta could continue to lead the country in many endeavours if it chose to do so. Apparently, the Redford government has other plans.

Mike Wevers is an independent consultant, retired from the Alberta Government as an Assistant Deputy Minister responsible for Strategic Capital Planning, mired both in budget numbers and an unwelcome spring snowfall in Edmonton.



News

Christ @ Culture

Lloyd Rang



I've been commuting to Toronto from Bowmanville every week for 13 years.

When I tell people this, they usually tilt their heads sympathetically

and say things like, "Oh, that must be hard." Or "I guess that takes a lot of time out of your day." Or, if they're from Toronto, they always ask, "Why don't you just move downtown?"

Really, I don't have much of a choice. Sharing my son's life 50/50 with his mom means his entire blended family needs to live in the same town. But there are other reasons to stay, too. I enjoy living in a town with greenspace, a real downtown, friendly people and good community spirit.

And commuting from Bowmanville is pretty easy. Taking the GO train, I can get from my house to my office at the University of Toronto in about an hour and a quarter. That's not that much more time than it would take if I lived in Markham and took transit.

But is it hard?

That's a different story. A bit of a long story, too:

In the year 2000, I had just left a seven-year teaching career and had begun working at Queen's Park as a speechwriter for Premier Mike Harris. Anyone who knew my politics – and that was everybody, because I wouldn't shut up about politics – knew that I detested the Harris government. So my friends were amused and I was conflicted: I finally had a job writing – something I had wanted to do my whole life – but I was writing to support a cause I deeply disagreed with. It was an interesting time.

At first, I liked the commute. I'd leave home early, grab a coffee and a muffin and a paper on the way, get on the GO Train in Oshawa, sharing the ride with a handful of commuters until the train filled up in Ajax. Then we'd arrive at Union Station in Toronto and I'd walk up to Queen's Park through the underground PATH, go to work until five and get home by 6:30.

It was all very civilized.

Then I started to work later. Working even five minutes overtime meant I'd miss my train and be home an hour later than usual. And the hours kept getting longer and longer. Soon, during special projects, I found myself having to stay in the office until midnight and overnighting in Toronto.

What was worse was that the trains started getting busier and busier. As the years went by, more and more commuters seemed to be moving east of Toronto. I'd arrive at the parking lot in Oshawa to find no spaces left. Then I'd have to squeeze into one of the only available seats, crammed in beside another miserable 905er as the train rumbled through the stops and picked up more passengers until it became standing-room-only, and hot, and filled with tired, restless and stressed-out souls.

Commuting beauty



"Instead of bored, shuffling, sheep-like masses, I saw something else."

A shared pinpoint

It was about this time that I started looking for work closer to home. Ironically, a new government – one more suited to my centrist politics – had been elected and I liked my job more than ever. But the commute was killing me. I was about to quit, but the political staff of the new government offered me a deal I couldn't refuse. A few years later, I tried to quit again, but they gave me flexible hours and permission to work from home a few times a week. The combination of flexibility, amazing colleagues, a great boss and an interesting job kept me in politics for 12 years which, in politics, is a lifetime.

It was during the last few years at Queen's Park that the experience of commuting turned another corner, so to speak. I began to appreciate the subtleties and the undercurrents of the commuting experience in a way I hadn't before. Instead of bored, shuffling masses headed into Union Station, and streaming underground like sheep through a chute, I saw something else.

I saw perfect little moments of humanity, all around me. I saw the dad, holding his child's hand, taking him to work on a PD day. I saw the girl, chatting up a handsome fireman collecting coins in his boot for charity. I saw the older gentleman who got on with me in Ajax, his Bible open on his lap and a silent prayer on his lips. Or the woman – about my age – who almost always rushed to get on the train in Oshawa and applied her makeup during the whole trip to Toronto.

I never spoke to any of these people, but I started to give them names and make up biographies for them. I know none of these stories are true, but part of me chooses to believe in them anyway. Because for 13 years I have seen the same faces, every day. I've seen my fellow commuters grow up and grow older. I've travelled with them as a silent partner in their lives – observing what they observe – sharing the same small space and breathing the same air.

The other day it struck me that this was a metaphor for life itself. That here, in this point in history as we all inhabit the same world and live through a unique slice of its history, together, even though we are strangers we are classmates, colleagues, people dancing on the same pinpoint in God's millennia-long plan for salvation and restoration. In a hundred years, it will be an all-new cast of commuters – moving through their time here together – until time itself reaches its inevitable end.

So when I look at the others in the train – I see, even in the most mundane details of our days – that what shines through are

not the things that separate us from one another. What stands out are not the jobs that we do during the day or the cars we drive on weekends – but what is remarkable is this journey we are on together, and how it shows us, in small ways, the depth of our shared humanity.

So, for me, the question "is my commute hard?" has two meanings, and one answer.

It was, for a while. But the longer I do it, the better I understand it, and the more beautiful it becomes.

Lloyd Rang (Lloyd.rang@rogers.com) lives in Bowmanville.

Officer Cadet de Boer awarded Jubilee Medal

Joshua de Boer, top student in his department and year at the Royal Military College, was awarded the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal by Brigadier General Eric Tremblay, Commandant. De Boer is currently pursuing an Honours degree in Computer Science and a diploma in Operations Research. He is attending RMC as a member of the University Training Program for Non Commissioned Members (UTPNCM), an Officer-generating program of the Canadian Forces. Previously, de Boer was the section commander of a classified computer network section used during the G8 and G20 in 2010.

In his 13 year career as a soldier, de Boer has also completed two tours of duty in Afghanistan. On his first tour (August 2003 to April 2004), he was a Command Post radio shift operator as well as the Kabul Multinational Brigade Quick Reaction Force Commander's Signaler. On his second tour (August 2008 to April 2009) he was the Signals NCO for Mike Company 3RCR. This Redeemer alum was responsible for all radio/computer communications out of the Patrol Base Sperwan Ghar and participated in regular patrols on foot and with the LAVs.

In the photo, de Boer is "rockin' the stache," as he puts it, in support of "Movember," a campaign to raise awareness about prostate cancer and to raise funds for cancer research.

De Boer notes, "It is my faith in God and the knowledge of redeeming love that has comforted and guided all that I've seen and done overseas and at home. My wife Sarah and I have been blessed by our church communities who have supported us and given us strength when I've been deployed."

The de Boers debuted in CC on Jan. 26, 2009 with an article by Sarah on military family life called "Uncertain future, certainty of God." The de Boers attend Westside Fellowship CRC in Kingstons.



Brigadier General Eric Tremblay (l.) presents the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal to Josh de Boer (r.).

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Editorials

In the desert – Poverty



Brian Bork

I know a recent graduate who just quit a high paying job for a regional engineering firm. The work was profoundly unsatisfying for him, on an existential level,

and he decided that instead of heading back into the daily grind, he'd go out and see the world. Not in the "luxury cruise down the Danube" kind of way. Hitching rides, hopping trains – that sort of thing.

That means traveling lean. So last weekend he gathered some friends and gave most of his things away, reserving for himself only the essentials (it's important to make sure you don't give away all your pants). The next morning, when he woke up in his newly empty apartment and surveyed the barren landscape of his living room, the first thought to pop into his mind was "oh crap, I've been robbed."

We are so attached to our stuff that even when we try to simplify, our first impulse is to wonder if we've been unjustly deprived. We don't do voluntary poverty well. Now that I think of it, we don't do it at all.

And maybe that's because many of us have memories of living in genuine poverty, after the war, for instance, or in those early post-grad days. But more likely, it's because there's a great deal of pleasure to be found going out and buying stuff. I know if I have a slow day at the office, I'll pop over to the campus book store, or the nearby Chapters, and pick up something to read while I wait for students to drop by. You can imagine the irony, then, of buying a book that quotes the desert father Serapion, who, when asked by a young brother, "Give me a word," replied, "What can I say to you? You have taken what belongs to widows and orphans and put it on your window

ledge." The young monk saw that the window ledge was full of books.

Serapion had the reputation of being the monk who sold his book of the Gospels and gave the money to those who were hungry, saying "I have sold the book which told me to sell all that I had and give to the poor."

Truly heavy-laden

Voluntary poverty was essential to desert life.

Part of the reason, undoubtedly, was out of concern for the well-being of their impoverished neighbours. By hoarding possessions – even books – the monastics believed that they were depriving their neighbors of the necessities of life. Having more than you need was in some sense a form of theft, an idea that has a deep yet largely forgotten pedigree in the Christian tradition (check out John Chrysostom's sermons "On Wealth and Poverty" for another ancient exploration of that idea).

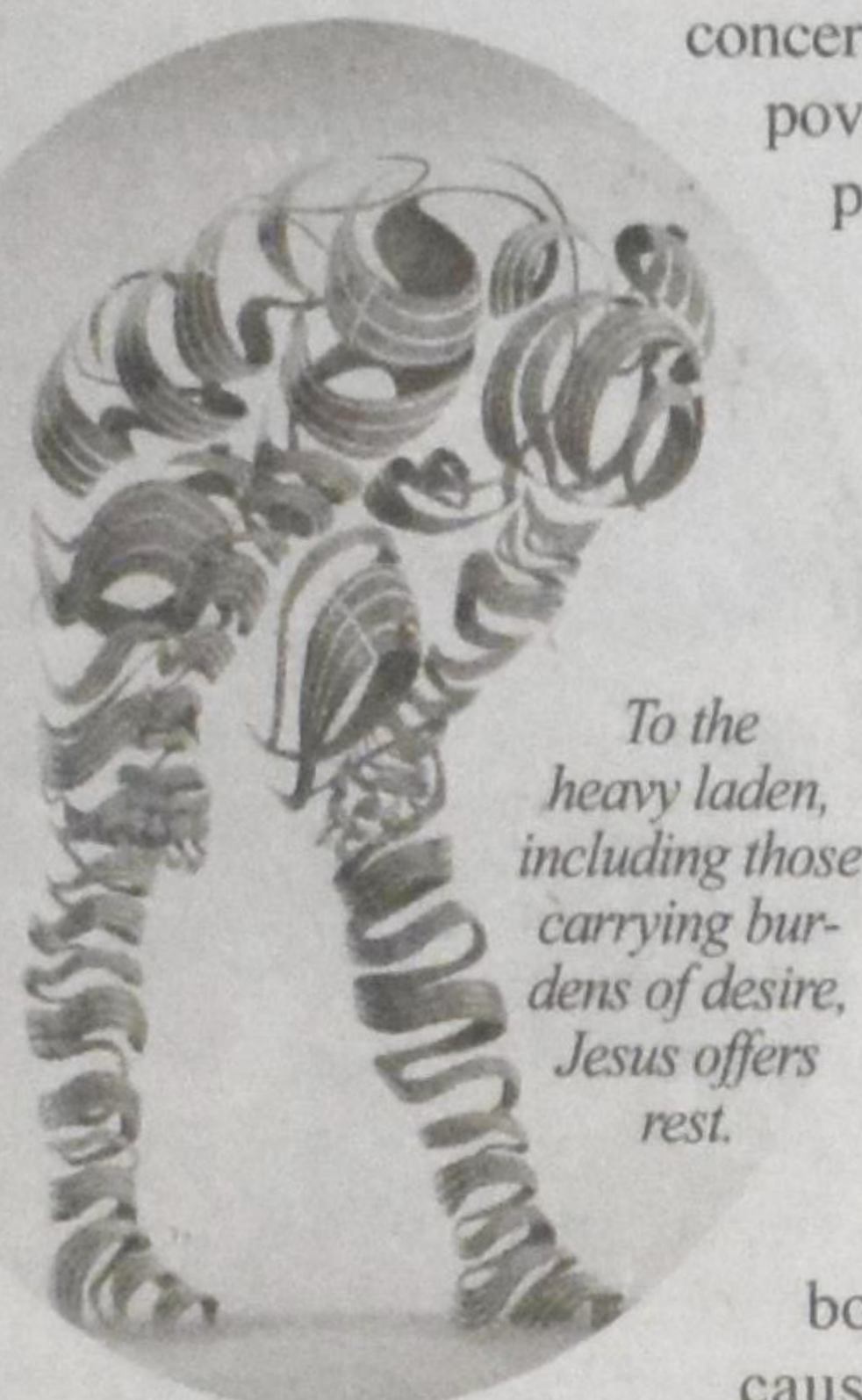
Serapion had no use for his book of the Gospels anyway, because he would've had the whole thing memorized. Which means he

would've been well acquainted with Jesus' gloriously reckless attitude toward money and possessions. But more significantly, he would've remembered Jesus' promise to give rest to the weary and the heavy laden. And I think Serapion would likely have had – ok, this is just a hunch – a broader interpretation of what it meant to be heavy laden. Not just a matter of the heart, in other words, but also the burden of desire, of wanting and having too much stuff.

One of the chief goals of the monastic life was "quies," which translates rather simply as "rest." Not in the feet up, pipe and slippers sort of way, but in a deeper, existential sense of the word. Thomas Merton describes "quies" as the sanity and poise found in being completely unpossessed and preoccupied by the "false self," which is fed by material anxiety and the complications of ownership. "Quies" is a form of detachment, really, and freedom from the distractions that prevent the Spirit from taking hold, from regenerating a "truer" self in each one of us.

It might be tempting to write that off as a load of quasi-Zen hokum. But the desert mothers and fathers weren't gnostics interested in emptiness, or complete, disembodied detachment at all. Monasteries are full of hedonists, after all, and poverty was the secret luxury of the desert life. Obviously, that implies a completely different understanding of what pleasure entails, one we might think is rather reckless and crazy. But then I consider friends of mine who've lost sleep over real estate deals, who complain about the stress of moving to a bigger house every few years, or I consider my own anxiety over whether I've put enough away for retirement (I'm 33), and I think: in the great cloud of witnesses, Serapion is the sane one among us.

Brian Bork is the CRC Chaplain at the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University.



'What should I have asked for?'



Angela Reitsma Bick

I'm in Starbucks skimming *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, jotting down questions for an interview with Ron Sider the next day. The irony is not lost on me. I pray, abashed, that God will free me from stinginess and apathy. Talking with Sider seems a good place to start.

One month later, my friend Mel hands me an unassuming brown book – 7: *An Experimental Mutiny Against Excess*.

"This book really messed me up," she warns. "Are you sure you want to read it?"

It's the account of a 7-month journey by Jen Hatmaker – Christian writer, speaker and mother of five. "I can't have authentic communion with Jesus," she came to realize, "mired in the trappings he begged me to avoid" (29). And so begins her repentance through reduction: a month eating only 7 kinds of food; a month getting rid of 7 possessions a day; a month praying 7 times a day, and so on. The categories are chosen based on her analysis of what, for their family, has become "just too stinking much" – food, clothes, possessions, media, waste, spending and stress. It's "an exercise in simplicity with one goal: to create space for God's kingdom to break through" (5). It's a wonderful book – hilarious, humble and convicting. I dare you to read it and remain unmoved.

It brought to mind a fairy tale I loved as a kid, *The Fisherman and his Wife*. Today, it haunts me.

It starts in a shack, but the wife would prefer a cottage. Innocent, right?

"Husband," said the woman, "didn't you catch anything today?"

"No," said the man. "I caught a flounder, but he told me that he was an enchanted prince, so I let him swim away."

"Didn't you ask for anything first?" said the woman.

"No," said the man. "What should I have asked for?"

What indeed. I am guilty of expecting a lot from God. A loving spouse? Well, yes. Children? Thank you. Maybe another house, this time with a garage? Good.

Jen Hatmaker reverses the fairy tale. Instead of continually asking for more, she slowly sheds the extra things that weigh so many of us down. It's inspiring to watch.

More

Everything went well for a week or two, and then the woman said, "Listen, husband. This cottage is too small. Go back and tell him to give us a palace."

I can come up with a good explanation for why it's OK to read 7 in Starbucks. After all, we don't splurge. I wear hand-me-downs. We drive an old car.

But living in pockets of Western affluence plays with your mind. I can relate to Hatmaker's confession: "For years I didn't realize [we were rich] because so many others had more." My happiness is embarrassingly tied to what those around us have and to whether we've improved our circumstances over time.

Ron Sider calls us out on this too. "One of the most astounding things about the affluent minority is that we honestly think we barely have enough to survive in modest comfort" (21). Like the fisherman's wife, I'm focused on *more*. And that means missing out on what God could do differently with the surplus, and with me.

Ruin

"Husband, wake up and go back to the flounder. I want to become like God. I will not have a single hour of peace until I myself cause the sun and the moon to rise."

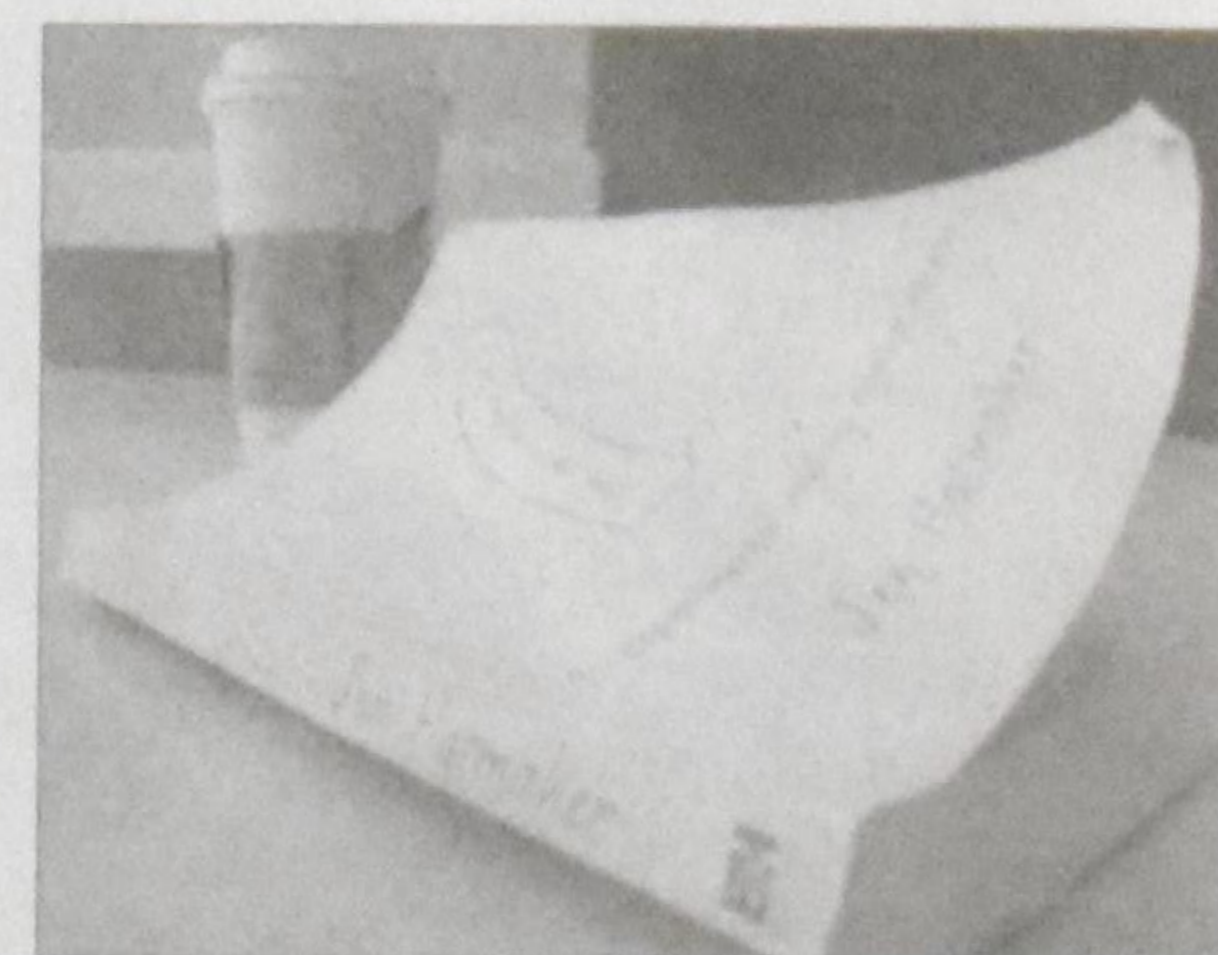
Maybe some people can handle great wealth, and use it for great good. But most of us are closer to the fisherman's wife. We live in a culture that prides itself on indulgence. We celebrate excess until we're blind to both our privilege and our greed.

"What does it communicate," Hatmaker asks, "when half the global population lives on less than \$2 a day, and we can't manage a fulfilling life on 25,000 times that amount?"

"It says we have too much, and it is *ruining* us" (4).

While writing the book, the Hatmakers are busy adopting two children from Ethiopia. During the month on food, her three biological children throw out uneaten chicken fingers one night, because they were out of ketchup. Hatmaker cries for all her kids – the ones still in Ethiopia, probably going to bed hungry that night, and the ones in Austin, Texas, "who will battle American complacency and overindulgence for the rest of their lives."

"I don't know who I feel worse for," she says.



7 suggests repentance through reduction.

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EDITORIAL TEAM & PRODUCTION STAFF

Editor: Angela Reitsma Bick editor@christiancourier.ca
Features Editor: Cathy Smith cathy@christiancourier.ca
Church News Editor: Marian Van Til marianvantil@roadrunner.com
Contributing Editor: Bert Witvoet bert.witvoet@sympatico.ca
Contributing Editor: Michael Buma mike@christiancourier.ca
Admin/ads/web: Ineke Medcalf-Strayer ads@christiancourier.ca
Circulation: Rose der Nederlanden rose@christiancourier.ca

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Letters

Personnel perspective on pastors

In "Fractured Flocks" (Feb. 11, CC), Peter Schuurman comments that, "The issue is certainly complex . . . indicating more of a crisis of cultural expectations than of leadership *per se*." What the article lacks is the perspective from the pew and from the council room in terms of the calling relationship.

It would have been beneficial to reprint the following articles from the Jan. 24, 2011 (CC) issue as a balancing counterpoint: "How pastors struggle," by Dane Ver Meeris and Bert van Hoek; "Reality check for pastors" by John Tamming, and "Living sermons and walking prayers" by Cathy Smith.

We are all broken in Christ, both the person in the pew as well as the staff member. From a personnel perspective some individuals come into leadership positions without proper training or skill sets, with mental health issues, with goals that are not congruent with those of the calling church and/or may find themselves in the wrong vocation. At times it is possible to grow into a position, or compensate with the help of others. Some individuals are like David, some Saul. These Article 17 issues are not necessarily matters of a "crisis of cultural expectations," but go to the heart of the dark side of a leadership culture.

Lubbert van der Laan
Abbotsford, B.C.

The three articles mentioned above (from Jan. 24, 2011) are now easily accessible on our website under Features, along with other frequently requested reprints. "Fractured Flocks" is permanently posted there too: christiancourier.ca – Editor

'What should I have asked for?' continued from p. 4

Enough

If there's any hope in the original Fisher's tale, the brothers Grimm don't highlight it. Perhaps only this – that with each request, the husband says to himself, "This is not right." But he goes anyway.

In Alexander Pushkin's retelling, the ending is redeemed. Once the fish revokes all their goods and glory, the couple finds a contentment in the shack that was elusive before.

Look over Jen Hatmaker's shoulder, and there are even better signs of hope – a reawakening among Christians.

"Here come the radicals!" declares the cover story in *Christianity Today* (March 2013). Best-selling books by pastors like David Platt (*Radical*), Francis Chan (*Crazy Love*) and Shane Claiborne (*The Irresistible Revolution*) are "calling comfortable Christians to extreme discipleship." And if the enormous popularity of all these books is any indication, the radicals have hit a nerve.

When I asked Ron Sider if anyone has picked up his mantle, he mentioned Claiborne (see interview, page 2). Many of the new radicals are the intellectual descendants of Sider, but not just of him – also of Mother

No longer like McDonalds Averting pastor/church divorce in diverse CRC

"Fractured Flocks" (Feb. 11, CC) speaks to a sad but prominent problem in the Christian Reformed Church in North America – the number of divorces between pastors and congregations.

Schuurman's article and the quotes placed alongside it highlight several contributing factors to this problem. It also recommends that congregations and pastors learn how to deal with and work through conflict rather than settle for a separation. As a pastor who struggles with conflict and who hasn't handled it well, I offer my "Amen" to that recommendation.

But I would like to draw attention to one of Schuurman's closing remarks. He observed, and I believe accurately, that the CRCNA is now experiencing a new internal pluralism. I wonder if that is as much a contributing factor as others mentioned. Here's what I mean.

Fifty years or so ago, CRCNA congregations shared almost identical menus of ministry: similar liturgies, creeds, confessions and hymn books, all rooted in a similar culture. As a result, you could attend almost any CR congregation in North America and find it similar to your home church.

Fifty years or so ago, the CRCNA and its congregations were much like the McDonalds Corporation. As the McDonalds Corporation trains its franchise managers at its corporate headquarters in Oak Brook, IL, so the CRCNA trained its future pastors at Calvin Theological Seminary, a fine school nestled in the corporate headquarters of Grand Rapids, Mich. When both finished their training they were branded with the

values, commitments, beliefs (culture) of the corporation. They were then prepared to serve any franchise or congregation throughout North America.

Fifty years ago pastors believed they could serve just about any CRCNA congregation in North America. In addition, congregations believed they could call just about any CRCNA pastor and look forward to a healthy chapter of ministry. This was possible because of the internal cultural uniformity of the CRCNA and its pastors.

New process needed

All that has changed. The CRCNA is now characterized by internal pluralism. Local congregations differ greatly from one another. Their ministry contexts differ significantly from one another. Pastors differ widely from one another. A growing percentage has completed at least part of their seminary training in places other than Grand Rapids. A growing percentage of our pastors come from multi-cultural families and ministry contexts. In other words, CRCNA congregations and pastors now differ from one another.

Internal pluralism raises many questions and issues. As it relates to the discussion now before us, I believe it forces us to admit that some congregations are just not a good fit for some pastors, and some pastors are not just a good fit for some congregations. One way, then, to minimize the potential for conflict between pastors and congregations is to work hard at the front end to determine if a pastoral candidate is a good fit for a congregation.

My question in response to Schuurman's excellent article, then, is this: Is it time to reevaluate the traditional search process by which pastors and congregations court one another? Is there something we can do differently on the front end to assure better matches between pastors and congregations and to minimize the number of conflicted marriages between pastors and congregations? I believe the answer to those

Teresa, Henri Nouwen, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Søren Kierkegaard, Menno Simons and – oh yeah – God, who has some 2,000 verses discussing money management in his book.

But is a journey away from the American Dream really radical, as CT wonders, or is it just basic Christian discipleship? It's true that there are tensions within this movement. (Such as: Stage Your Own Mutiny by buying *The 7 Experiment* – Leader's Guide and DVD set only \$69.95.)

But overall, I'm in. Sign me up. "We're so conditioned to being the problem," Hatmaker says, "that we've forgotten that we are actually the answer."

There are wide, gaping holes between what we profess and what we possess, and grappling with that as Christians in this time and place is an important, and ongoing, task.

"What should I have asked for?"

Freedom from "more," rescue from ruin, and to inherit Jesus' understanding of what it means to be rich and blessed. ✂

Angela Reitsma Bick is Editor of Christian Courier. She lives in Barrie with her family.



WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Fourth Annual *Christian Courier* Short Story Contest!

I: Send in your original short fiction (1000 to 3000 words) on any theme by May 1, 2013. First prize receives \$100 and publication in a summer issue of *Christian Courier*. Please note that this contest is for fictional short stories, not essays or articles. Second prize receives a year's subscription. All stories must be submitted electronically to cathy@christiancourier.ca. Entries over the word limit will not be considered.

II: Our readers 8 to 14 years of age can participate in the category for youth. There will be two divisions: junior (Grades 3-5) and Intermediate (Grades 6-8). Send your short stories (500-1000 words) to cathy@christiancourier.ca by May 1, 2013. Entries over the word limit will not be considered. The first-place winner in each division will win a gift certificate to Toys'R'Us valued at \$50. All stories will be considered for publication in CC.

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questions is YES. In the past decade many congregations and pastoral candidates have experienced the benefits of an independent third party, a person commonly referred to as a "consultant" or "head-hunter." Such a person partners with the congregation with but one objective: a great marriage between pastor and people, one that leads to effective ministry together. Together, with the help of the Holy Spirit, they enter a discernment process that leads to the eventual discovery of the next pastor. This approach has been found to be very effective.

Surely there are many other initiatives that could be taken to improve the relationships between pastors and their congregations, but I hope congregations and pastors alike would continue to recognize the internal pluralism of the CRCNA, the corresponding challenge of good fits between pastors and congregations, and continue to evaluate the processes by which pastors and congregations court one another.

Sam Hamstra, Jr.
Founder of ChapterNext
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News

CRC offers internships to Canadian young people

BURLINGTON, Ont. (CRCNA) – Several Canadian young people will be given the chance to experience cross-cultural living while assisting people in need and learning about international development thanks to a new International Youth Internship Program (IYIP) offered by World Renew and supported by the Canadian government through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). World Renew is the former Christian Reformed World Relief Committee.

“Our Government is proud to provide young Canadians with the opportunity to participate in international assistance projects in developing countries,” said the Honourable Julian Fantino, Minister of International Cooperation, as he announced the agreement to provide funding to World Renew and 23 other organizations to provide international development internships.

World Renew’s internships will be offered to four Canadians who will gain a

learning experience in Cambodia, Honduras, Mozambique and Senegal. “Each intern will be placed with one of World Renew’s field offices or community partners,” explained Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo, World Renew director.

“They will gain crucial skills and international experience.” Throughout their time with World Renew, the interns will be supported and mentored by key World Renew personnel.

“We know that young people are more aware than ever about global issues and are interested in being involved. These internships are one way that World Renew can tap into that enthusiasm. They provide a handful of young people with hands-on training and will equip them for a possible future in international development,” said Mutoigo.

World Renew also provides several other ways for young people get more involved including a 24-hour fast, several short-term volunteer placements and regular fund and awareness-raising campaigns. World Re-



PHOTO BY MARK WIKKERINK, COURTESY WORLDRENEW.NET

Youth today are passionate about global issues.

new also engages young adults as members of its board.

The application process for these new internships will begin later this spring. Applicants must be Canadians between the ages

of 19 and 30. They must also be graduates of a post-secondary program and not currently employed full-time in their area of study. For more information, contact Iona Buisman at ibuisman@worldrenew.net.

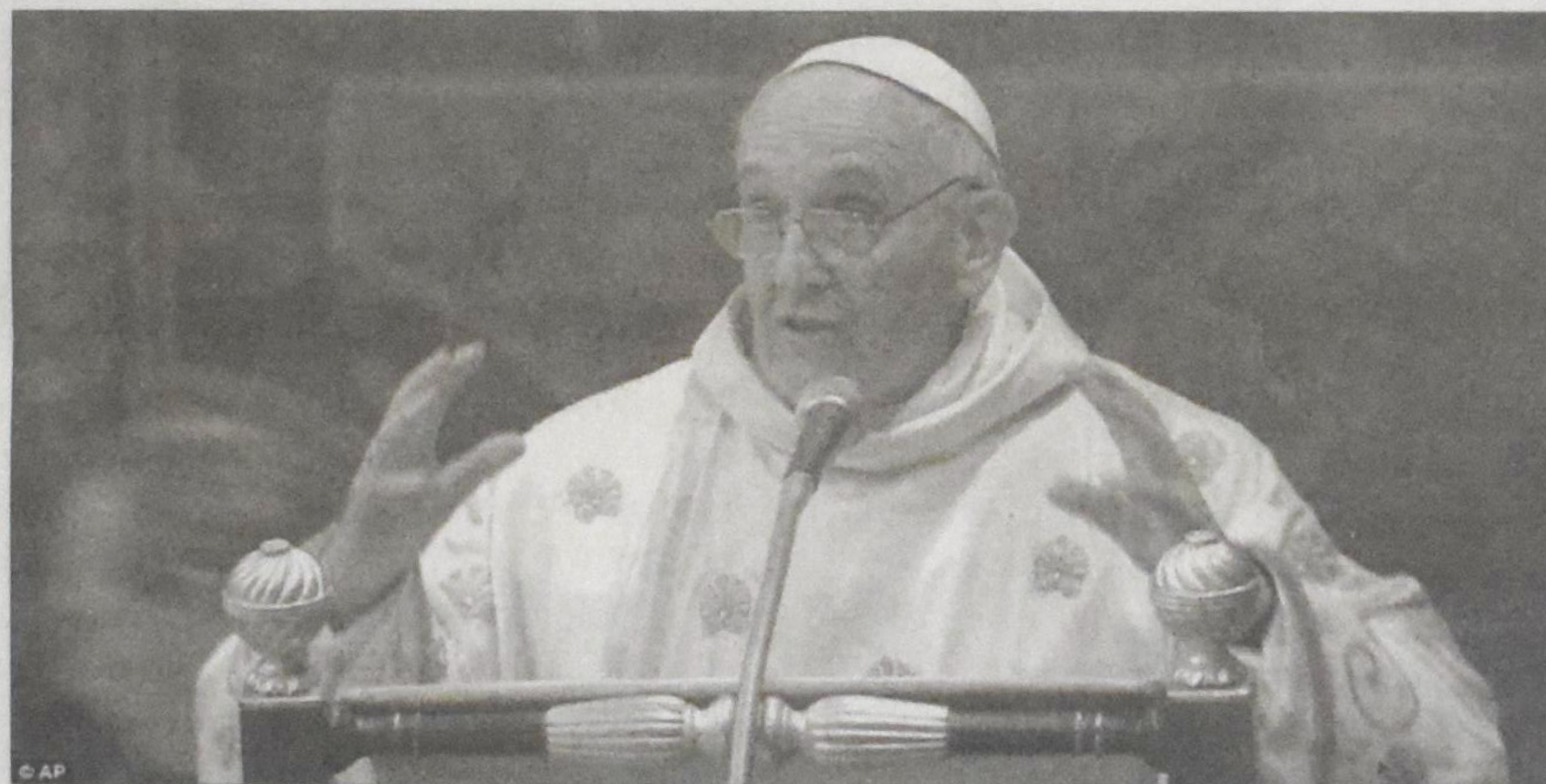
Francis' first homily as pope: 'Walk with the cross in the Lord's presence'

While the numerous doctrinal and practical differences remain between the various Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church, evangelical and Reformed church leaders have been largely positive in their reactions to the election of Argentina's Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio as pope of the worldwide Roman church. The excerpt below from Pope Francis' first sermon as pope, delivered on March 14 in the Sistine Chapel, perhaps shows why, and gives a taste of Francis' understanding of faith committed to Christ. – Marian Van Til

The Scripture lessons for the day were from Isaiah 2:2-5, 1 Peter 2:4-9 and Matthew 16:13-19.

“In these three readings I see that there is something in common: it is movement. In the first reading, movement is the journey [itself]; in the second reading, movement is in the up-building of the Church. In the third, in the Gospel, the movement is in [the act of] profession: walking, building, professing.

“Walking: the House of Jacob. “O house of Jacob, Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.” This is the first thing God said to Abraham: “Walk in my presence and be blameless.” Walking: our life is a journey and when we stop, there is something wrong. Walking always, in the presence of the Lord, in the light of the Lord, seeking to live with that blamelessness, which God



New Pope's message is one all Christians can agree on.

asks of Abraham, in his promise.

“Building: to build the Church. There is talk of stones: stones have consistency, but [the stones spoken of are] living stones, stones anointed by the Holy Spirit. Build up the Church, the Bride of Christ, the cornerstone of which is the same Lord. With [every] movement in our lives, let us build!

“Third, professing: we can walk as much we want, we can build many things, but if we do not confess Jesus Christ, nothing will avail. We will become a pitiful NGO, but not the Church, the Bride of Christ. When one does not walk, one stalls. When one does not built on solid rocks, what happens? What happens is what happens to children on the beach when they make sandcastles: everything collapses, it is without consistency. When one does not profess Jesus Christ – I recall the phrase of Leon Bloy – “Whoever does not pray to God, prays to the devil.” When one does not profess Jesus Christ, one professes the worldliness of the devil.

“Walking, building-constructing, professing: the thing, however, is not so easy,

because in walking, in building, in professing, there are sometimes shake-ups – there are movements that are not part of the path: there are movements that pull us back.

“This Gospel continues with a special situation. The same Peter who confessed Jesus Christ, says, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. I will follow you, but let us not speak of the Cross. This has nothing to do with it.” He says, “I’ll follow you on other ways, that do not include the Cross.” When we walk without the Cross, when we build without the Cross, and when we profess Christ without the Cross, we are not disciples of the Lord. We are worldly, we are bishops, priests, cardinals, Popes, but not disciples of the Lord.

“I would like that all of us, after these days of grace, might have the courage – the courage – to walk in the presence of the Lord, with the Cross of the Lord: to build the Church on the Blood of the Lord, which is shed on the Cross, and to profess the one glory, Christ Crucified. In this way, the Church will go forward.”

Netherlands: 'Group marriage' is the next step

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (TCI) – The Dutch politician who masterminded the “gay marriage” campaign in the Netherlands says that “group marriage” is now being discussed in the country.

Boris Dittrich, a former politician, gave a video interview last month about how he successfully introduced “gay marriage.” He said in addition, “There is now a discussion in the Netherlands that sometimes people want to marry with three people and maybe even more.” Dittrich admitted, “But that’s the beginning of something completely new and that will take a lot of years I guess.” In fact, three-way relationships have already been recognized in the Netherlands under “cohabitation agreements.”

The Netherlands is not entirely alone in this approach. In Canada public schools have been encouraged to display posters which promote the acceptance of polygamy. In Brazil, a relationship of more than two people has been officially recognized. In Australia, a campaign group has formed to push for legal rights for ‘polyamorous’ relationships. And in Britain, as in the U.S., the government wants to redefine marriage. Critics in both countries warn it will cause marriage to unravel.



Toronto schools were criticized for this poster, called “love has no gender.”

News

New Canterbury archbishop is an evangelical Anglican

Marian Van Til, with files from CCO, *ChristianToday, Guardian, YouGov Census*

CANTERBURY, UK – The Roman Catholic Church was not the only worldwide church to recently welcome a new leader after the resignation of the previous one. The Anglican Communion, which has some 80 million members across the globe, also has a new head. Justin Welby, 57, replaced the retiring Rowan Williams and was “enthroned” as the 105th Archbishop of Canterbury on March 21.

Welby began his career in the oil business and high finance but radically switched tracks when he felt called to the Anglican priesthood. Before his recent appointment Welby was the Bishop of Durham for just one year. Previous to that he was the Dean of Liverpool, and before that he was a part of the reconciliation ministry of Coventry Cathedral.

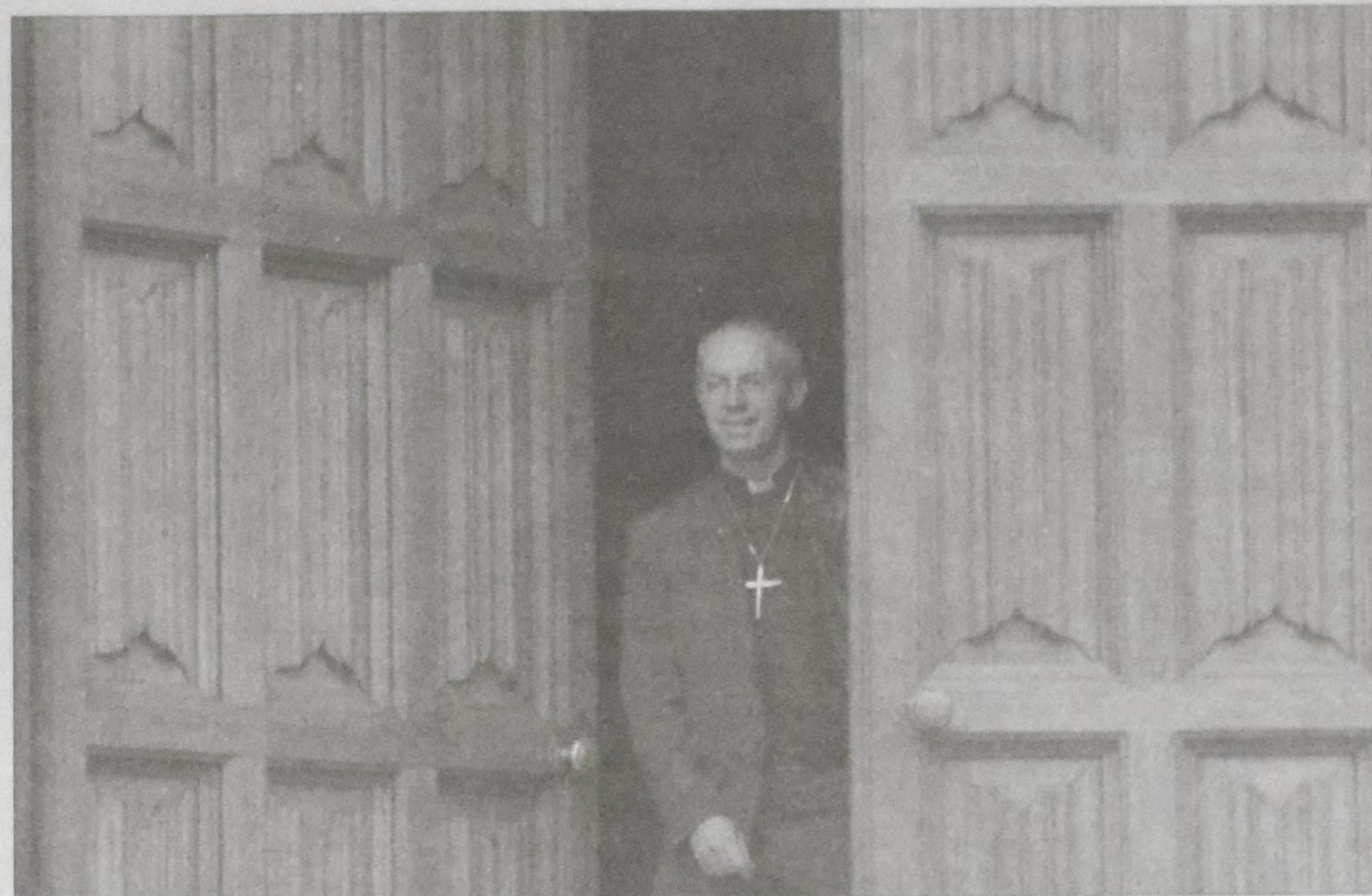
Commentator Wayne Clarke, writing in the UK online magazine *Christian Today* says, “The appointment of Justin Welby as Archbishop of Canterbury marks the ascendancy of bold, socially engaged evangelical faith within the Church of England.”

Clarke notes that Welby’s education is similar to that of some previous archbishops: he went to Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge. Yet Welby “is a different kind of educated gentleman from those of a previous generation. His faith is rooted in Christ who came to serve, not to rule, and while his background has opened doors, his ambitions have been for the growth

of God’s Kingdom, not for personal aggrandizement.” That attitude and approach is being compared to the kind of faith and mindset that the new Roman Catholic pope has already revealed.

Nevertheless, Clarke notes that “Welby’s appointment will not please everyone in the Church.” Evangelicalism in any form has long been looked down upon by “mainstream” Christians and secular people alike. (In the 18th century, Christians who adopted the dissenting evangelicalism of the Wesleys, George Whitefield and others, were sneeringly referred to as “Enthusiasts.”) Welby, however, “represents a move to an open evangelical position that some at the liberal end of the Church will not be delighted about,” says Clarke. “Neither will he please the most conservative of evangelicals. But he stands in a strong place to represent mainline evangelical opinion in the Church and may just be the man to hold the Church of England and the whole Anglican Communion together.”

Some years ago, when Welby was a member of the evangelical Anglican congregation known as Holy Trinity Brompton, he was heavily involved with the basic Christianity course called “Alpha.” Alpha, which began in Britain and has spread to many parts of the world, is solidly based on the Bible and as such is “unashamedly evangelical,” in Wayne Clarke’s words. It is a 10-week course involving both teaching – a “practical introduction to the Christian



Step out of the comfort of your tradition, new Archbishop says.

faith” – and much fellowship among hosting church members and course attendees. Using a biblical perspective it helps people “answer life’s big questions,” according to Alpha founders. Welby’s experience with Alpha reveals much about “where he’s coming from,” according to observers.

Heed Christ’s call

Despite Welby’s general evangelical conservatism (he adheres to biblical authority and opposes the ordination of women and gay “marriage”), the left-leaning paper *The Guardian* had surprisingly a positive take on Welby: “His confidence in the Christian message is wholehearted, but not superficial. He talks freely, not just of social reform and economic regeneration, but of relationship

with Jesus Christ as the answer to humanity’s deepest needs. His ultimate aim is the reconversion of Britain and his adamant resilience springs from his faith.”

Said Welby himself in his inaugural sermon, “There is every possible reason for optimism about the future of Christian faith in our world and in this country. Optimism does not come from us, but because to us and to all people Jesus comes and says ‘Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.’ We are called to step out of the comfort of our own traditions and places, and go into the waves, reaching for the hand of Christ. Let us provoke each other to heed the call of Christ, to be clear in our declaration of Christ, committed in prayer to Christ, and we will see a world transformed.”

U.S.: Violent entertainment is poison, say mental health experts

WASHINGTON, D.C. (CNSNews.com) – Violent entertainment is “polluting the culture” in the U.S. and is “a poison” to the minds of alienated individuals and would-be shooters, according to mental health experts at a forum held on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., late last month. “Culture matters,” forensic psychiatrist Michael Welner said, especially when it comes to understanding what is in the minds of mass shooters.

The House-of-Representatives-sponsored forum focused on the role of mental illness in mass shootings like the one last December at a school in Newtown, Connecticut. Adam Lanza, a lone gunman who was mentally ill, killed 26 people, 20 of them children. Lanza is also said to have spent much of his time playing violent video games.

Welner said that popular culture “matters” to mental illness in the same way that culture can influence physical well-being. “We now have a national imperative against obesity because we’ve understood that eating habits have some impact on actual physical illness.”

Welner continued, “I will tell you, though, our fascination now – indoctrination of a culture of young people with violence through entertainment media that are polluting the culture of this United States – has to be dealt with the same way we dealt



The author of “I am Adam Lanza’s Mom,” on raising a mentally disturbed son.

with the tobacco industry. The convergence of this poison – and it is a poison – on the developing minds and vulnerability is the last thing a paranoid individual who is alienated and isolated needs.”

Mistaken ‘compassion’ creates mess

Rep. Tim Murphy (R-Pa.), chairman of House Energy and Commerce Committee’s sub-committee on Oversight and Investigations, held the bipartisan event. Murphy is a psychologist who is also co-chair of House Mental Health Caucus and is a founding member of GOP Doctors’ Caucus. He said, “The common factor in many mass tragedies is an underlying mental illness. The lessons . . . from the horrifying tragedy in Connecticut

is that we had better take off our blinders and deal with such illness or we are sure to face the same problem again. It is not only what’s in a person’s hands that makes his act violent, it’s what is in his mind.”

Three parents of children with mental illness spoke at the event, including Liza Long, whose blog “I am Adam Lanza’s Mom” (meaning her son, Michael, has similar mental problems) went viral when she posted it after the Newtown killings. On the blog, Long wrote that she and other parents of mentally ill children face the same stigma and obstacles when trying to get them treatment as Adam Lanza’s mother faced. She said that on numerous occasions her son, 13, had threatened to kill her and himself.

Long said, “I love my son. But he – and I – and other parents and children like us need help. . . . My son has been diagnosed with several conditions. Michael has taken a cornucopia of pharmaceuticals to try to control his rages. We have not yet found a combination of treatments and medications to manage his condition.” Long continued, “When I asked Michael what he wanted me to say to you, he said, ‘Tell them I’m not a bad kid. Tell them I want to be well.’”

Parents and mental health experts say that getting help for adult children is es-

pecially challenging because of differing state laws on the terms of commitment and a federal “accountability” act whose privacy stipulations make it almost impossible for parents to get treatment for children over 18.

The discussion included the changes in the U.S. mental health system in the 50 years since President Kennedy’s Community Mental Health Act led to the closing of state mental hospitals. The law inadvertently led to today’s mentally ill living on the streets or in prisons. In those 50 years the availability of public psychiatric beds in the U.S. has decreased to 43,000 from 559,000, even as the population has increased.

Rep. Murphy acknowledged the flaws in the previous approach to dealing with mental illness. But today’s alternative isn’t working either. “Fifty 50 years ago, we released them from hospitals for reasons we mistook for compassion. Too many of them ended up on the streets without decent access to treatment. The majority of the mentally ill should be receiving care in the community setting, but for many with severe mental illness, de-institutionalization was a disaster, the after-effects of which we are still struggling to recover from, even today. Now, too many fill our prisons and are left as the wandering homeless.”

Columns

Technically Speaking

Derek Schuurman



A future without work?



The story of John Henry is a classic American legend about a steel driver who worked on the railway. One day, the railway owner buys a steam-powered hammer and the jobs of all the workers are threatened. In a bid to save their jobs, John Henry suggests a contest: he will race the steam-powered hammer. Although John Henry wins the race, he collapses and dies in his efforts. A similar story is told in a short film about the lumberjack Paul Bunyan, who challenges a steam-powered saw by wielding an axe.

The story of machines displacing the work of humans is not just the stuff of legends. Already at the start of the Industrial Revolution, a group of disgruntled workers known as Luddites smashed machines to protest growing automation in the textile industry. And although, during the Industrial Revolution, the introduction of new technology did displace certain jobs, it simultaneously created new jobs. For example, buggy-whip manufacturers were put to work in automotive manufacturing. The typewriter industry faded, but it gave way to the personal computer industry. And so it went for much of the 20th century.

But the authors of a recent book titled *Race Against the Machine* make the case that things are changing: the digital revolution and increasing pace of automation are rapidly transforming the economy and employment. In the years following the last recession, corporate profits have returned, but the recovery has been a “jobless” one. Already in his 1995 book, *The End of Work*, Jeremy Rifkin grimly predicted “we are entering a new phase in world history – one in which fewer and fewer workers will be needed to produce the goods and services for the global population.”



In the early 2000's I was a graduate student doing research in the area of robot vision. If you had asked me at that time if it would ever be possible to automate the driving of a car, I would have likely laughed; building machines to autonomously navigate unstructured environments is extremely difficult. However, by the end of the decade Google had already successfully created a driverless car. It is not unthinkable that in the next decade autonomous vehicles may become more common. Consider all the jobs which involve driving: trucks, taxis, buses and delivery vehicles. What would happen if they were all automated? This is in addition to the automation of manufacturing jobs, where robots continue to displace people on the factory floor. Service jobs have also been disappearing with the rise of automated checkouts, online shopping and automated tellers.

Called to work

And it isn't just manufacturing and service industries that will be affected. White collar jobs are increasingly being automated, driven by innovations in artificial intelligence and pattern recognition. Computers, like the one named Watson which won against the reigning human champion on the quiz show *Jeopardy*, could also be used in law and medicine. Even the jobs of professors are not secure; many post-secondary institutions are now exploring the use of online lectures and electronic content delivery.

The goal of many businesses is to produce goods and services as efficiently as possible, but the end-game of that approach is a world of unemployed people who can't afford those products and services. Furthermore, the lack of work can have a devastating sociological effect. Work is not something to be avoided but is part of our creational calling in this world. In a line from a ballad titled *The Legend of John Henry's Hammer*, Johnny Cash sings, “Did the Lord say that machines oughta take the place of living?”

If indeed machines become capable of replacing many of our jobs, we will need to refresh a robust perspective on work. This should lead to efforts to establish a climate that discourages total automation in many jobs, and instead provides incentives to preserve meaningful work for people. We need to stop racing *against* our machines, and find ways to shape them so they serve human flourishing and contribute to shalom.

Derek Schuurman (dschuur@cs.redeemer.ca) still has a job as a computer science professor at Redeemer University College. He is the author of a forthcoming book called *Shaping a Digital World*, which will be published by InterVarsity Press in June.

Women finding more happiness in their kitchens?

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of *The Feminine Mystique*

Nandy Heule

When I fudge the truth a little, I was born the same year Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*. This year, media worldwide, including Canada's *Globe and Mail*, are paying attention to *Mystique*'s 50th anniversary. Pundits are assessing what has changed since Friedan wrote her book. It has been widely credited with launching the modern feminist movement.

In her opening paragraph, Friedan observed in 1963, the “problem-without-a-name... lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction [...] She was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question – ‘Is this all?’”

This silent question gave birth to North American women's search for self-fulfillment.

Many Christian women of my generation embraced feminism, often without acknowledging thinkers such as Friedan. For many the question “Is this all?” changed into “All of this!” We car-pooled our kids to GEMS after work; taught Sunday School in the mornings while preparing Monday's lunches at night; and felt too guilty too often for failing to “enforce” the Sabbath rest we grew up with: no Sunday sport competitions, no shopping, and, by all means, have the pot of soup ready on Saturdays so cooking can be avoided on the Lords' Day.

Fast-forward to 2009. A lawyer from the next generation of female leaders was sitting on a bus in New York when she realized she “was suffering from a recurrent sense of discontent and almost a feeling of disbelief. ‘Can this be me?’... I had everything I could possibly want – yet I was failing to appreciate it.”

Gretchen Rubin went on to write *The Happiness Project* – a run-away bestseller. This quick read is now said to have launched a new social movement. The book seemed to have given birth to a search for “true happiness” (see *Christian Courier*, March 25, 2013 for a review of Rubin's second book, *Happier at Home*).

Rubin carefully explains she doesn't want to reject her life; an emphasis I suspect must be a throw-back to Friedan's radical call for change. Rather, she concludes, “I want to change my life... by finding more happiness in my own kitchen” and, I add, her own office.

The Mommy ceiling

Ironically, *The Atlantic* recently published an article by Anne-Marie Slaughter, a Princeton law professor who just ended a high-powered assignment at the American State Department, with the headline, “Why Women Still Can't Have it All.”

In summary, 50 years after the *Mystique* made its debut, a young New Yorker becomes a bestselling author writing about her Happiness Project while a prominent middle-aged law professor concludes that “women who have managed to be both mothers and top professionals are superhuman, rich or self-employed.”

Which begs the question, has nothing changed in 50 years since the publication of Friedan's



Mystique? Professional women in their 50ties and 30ties seem to be asking questions similar to the stay-at-home mothers who revolutionized women's role in secular society as well as in the church.

The tempting answer may be that, indeed, nothing will change fundamentally as long as women and men search for fulfillment and happiness in all the wrong places – in the home and on the job. “Seek first the kingdom... and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt 6:33) – right? If only we prioritized our time and money, personal fulfillment and happiness would automatically follow. Unfortunately, that's not an answer most women (or men) I know find particularly helpful.

Ms. Slaughter's answer doesn't sound convincing either: “We must insist on changing social policies and bending career tracks to accommodate *our* [women's] choices too. We'll create a better society in the process for *all* women. We may need to put a woman in the White House before we are able to change the conditions of the women working at Walmart.” Sounds good, but does historical evidence demonstrate that women in leadership create a better world? Power corrupts men and women alike. Moreover, this strategy seems to leave unanswered the wider search for contentment.

I don't think there is an easy answer for the ongoing search for self-fulfillment, happiness and equal opportunity. However, as Christians, we can call for radical equality outlined by the Apostle Paul: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

What if we were to truly embrace that we are all one [in Christ]; what if we took this position as our starting point as we seek fulfillment and happiness? Wouldn't we be more innovative, generous and content with the choices we make about lives? Almost certainly, we would be less judgemental about the choices others make about their lives in the workplace and beyond. Finally, taking true equality in Christ as our starting point may help us feel motivated to create choice and opportunity for the many women (and men) who have none. Ready or not, this may indeed bring us back to square one: “Seek ye first the kingdom and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Nandy Heule is a communications consultant based in Toronto. You can check her work at heulecommunications.com.

Reviews



Fixing the Moral Deficit:
a balanced way to
balance the budget
by Ronald J. Sider
Intervarsity Press (2012) 169 p.

A deficit of the heart?

Ron Sider's new book

Mike Wevers

Ronald J. Sider has long been a prophetic voice in the United States evangelical movement calling upon Americans and their government to gird their political decision making with a Godly and righteous foundation. In 1973, after a Calvin College-hosted conference on politics, Sider, together with some 40 other people interested in pursuing greater political action in the Christian community, founded the Evangelicals for Social Action. His 1977 seminal work *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* followed, laying a groundwork from which Christians concerned about political action could move forward.

His recent *Fixing the Moral Deficit* is consistent with his now decades-old work. Central to his new book, both literally and figuratively, are seven foundational principles to guide government and its citizens in dealing with budget priorities. The opening chapters of the book are a primer on the desperate fiscal situation the American people face. Through that analysis, like some unassailable inductive logician, Sider leads us to the strongest part of his book. He builds his principles and norms for developing a budget to address the "moral deficit" which pervades, in his opinion, our political economy discourse. The concluding chapters address specific United States federal programs with a view to reducing spending where appropriate, while recommending improvements to programs which should be protected.

Intergenerational justice

Key to the Sider's principles is an overriding requirement to alleviate poverty, supporting those who need it most, and recognizing the government has an important role to play here. Interestingly, but not surprisingly from an American viewpoint, Sider's first principle asserts the case for personal freedom, but one that carries with it a "communal interdependence." This leads to his second principle, that we have a responsibility to our neighbour. And in some respects, from his perspective, the most important neighbour is the poorest amongst us. His third principle asserts God has a special concern for the poor, and consequently, so must God's people.

The first three principles would appear to be the keystones around which his other

principles are built. Achieving justice by providing equal opportunity to access resources; reducing inequality, and recognizing government has a significant and legitimate role in achieving those. Finally, there must be intergenerational justice. This generation cannot burden a future generation with problems we created. Sider uses some of his strongest language and personal reflection regarding this principle: "It is flatly immoral for my generation of Americans . . . to demand continuing federal expenditures that we refuse to pay for. Putting my current purchases on my grandchildren's credit card is outrageous injustice."

Addressing this injustice drives the final chapters of the book. Sider moves to concrete examples of government spending and revenue generation which will start reducing the deficit. While acting on his recommendations may staunch the bleeding and start to deal with reducing the United States deficit, it is going to take a gargantuan effort beyond those recommendations to drive the U.S. to a surplus position which would enable reducing the debt.

Read the Bible, be informed

Sider understandably is focused on the U.S. situation. While his guiding principles may be universal, Canadian readers of the final chapters may be hard pressed to understand some of the specific programs analysis, even though Sider's critique may reflect some of his Canadian roots (he is Canadian born and did his undergrad at Waterloo). Military, health care and social program spending dominate the prescriptive chapters. While the Canadian federal and provincial governments face budgetary pressures in these areas, that is about the extent of the similarity. Military spending just does not have the dominance in Canada that it has in the U.S., where foreign engagements cost billions and the wealth of many congressional districts depends significantly on the military-industrial complex. Our single-payer, universal health care system avoids much of the additional, needless spending that permeates the American health care. Consequently, it is difficult to apply Sider's prescriptive advice to other than his United States home.

Sider does conclude with 18 suggested actions we can all readily take. As people of God, Sider's starting point is to read the Bible. Godly people must seek God's will in all of this. If that is the foremost step, I am surprised that Sider's 18th step is to keep informed. There are many useful ideas in between those two steps. But to become more active in your community you should be well informed of what governments do and not do. Sider's book and much of his work is to serve just that – get people to understand what is happening and show them how to get involved. So we can all live Micah's precept: *To act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.*



Girl Rising (2013)
Directed by
Richard Robbins
Ten Times Ten
Productions, Inc.

Girl Rising will
be aired on CNN
in the late spring.
You can learn
more about the
film and how
to respond at
10x10act.org.

Undaunted: New film on the effect of educating girls

Lisa Van Engen

Globally, 66 million girls are currently not enrolled in either primary or secondary education (UNESCO, 2012). A new documentary film called *Girl Rising* tells the stories of nine such girls: Sokha, Senna, Yasmin, Amina, Mariama, Suma, Azmera, Ruksana and Wadley. Their memories, unbreakable spirits and collective courage build a narrative that inspires. Girls around the world deserve an equal chance for freedom and education.

The film opens with the fluid dancing of Sokha. She's an orphan from Cambodia, gleaning all she has from garbage dumps. She rises out of poverty when given the opportunity for education. Then, in a cold gold-mining town in mountainous Peru we meet Senna, named by her father after Xena the princess warrior. After a mining accident, her father grows ill and their family descends further into the grip of poverty. Her father encourages her to keep up with school and she finds her voice writing poetry. Her name, the warrior, speaks to her dreams of becoming a fearless defender of the poor.

Next is the victim of a violent attack, Yasmin of Egypt, who imagines herself as a triumphant superhero. After her, muted in a shroud of blue, stands Amina of Afghanistan – a child bride at age 11, traded for the price of a used car. Amina stares into the camera lens saying defiantly, "I don't believe in your resignation."

Mariama of Sierra Leone fights against the stereotype that girls will become disrespectful if they attend school. She hosts a radio show that enables her to help other girls. A bonded slave since age six, Suma from Nepal, is finally rescued. Her memories seep into the songs she writes and sings with heartbreaking resolve. And these are only a few snippets of their stories.

We will press on

Interwoven seamlessly between the stories are girls in an open field citing some staggering facts about education. Academy Award-Nominated director, Richard E. Robbins, demonstrates with statistics that educating girls is the highest return on any investment the world can make.

Azmera of Ethiopia lives with her mother and brother. Typical of Ethiopian society, Azmera is about to be sold as a young bride in an arranged marriage. Her brother offers to sell all he owns to keep his sister from marriage and free to attend school. His courage rescues her.

Ruksana of India is a dreamer, doodling during school. Her father sacrifices everything for an education for his three girls. They live as pavement dwellers on a city street.

Food is scarce, yet her father purchases Ruksana a notebook and coloured pencils to draw.

Wadley of Haiti, age seven, finds herself out of school and in poverty after the 2010 earthquake. Her mother is unable to afford school fees. Wadley shows up to school anyway. "I will come back every day until I can stay," she proclaims. Undaunted, she displays her infectious smile. She will stay.

These girls stand as nine of 66 million. Under the slant of their native trees, below the rays of the shifting sun, in a mass of color and life they are rising. "If you try to stop me, I will just try harder. If you stop me there will be others who take my place." Overwhelmed by the weight of devastating poverty, pressed down by traditions of inequality and sold to men, these girls stand tall and offer up their voices to change the world.

Educating girls not only changes their individual lives; it also transforms their families and communities. Watch this film, draw near to their stories and then realize that we in the West can offer hope. We can be the brother that stands for his sister's freedom. We can be Ruksana's parents huddled on the street in the rain all for the hope of education. Azmera's mom asks, how much can one woman carry? Jesus took the weight of the world on his shoulders. We too can hear their courageous voices, calling us to respond.

Lisa Van Engen writes at aboutproximity.com encouraging others to place themselves in the proximity of renewal. She lives with her husband and two children in Michigan.

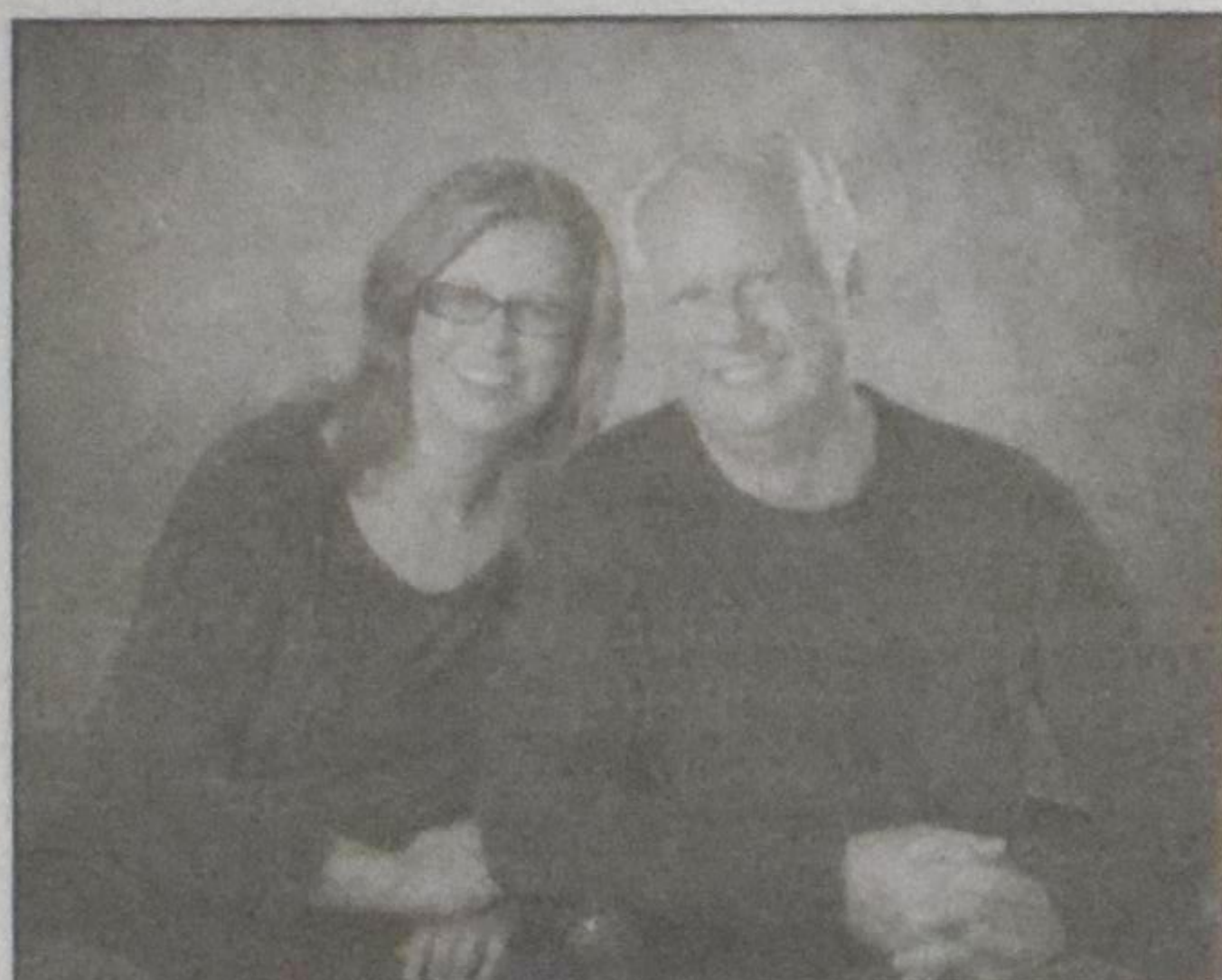


"If you try to stop me, I will just try harder. Others will take my place."



Features

New Adventures: An interview with the President of The Institute for Christian Studies, Rev. Dr. Tom and Dawn Wolthuis



Rev. Dr. Tom and Dawn Wolthuis, President of ICS.

Cathy Smith

On Wednesday, March 13, 2013, at the Sarnia home of our mutual friend, Diane Plug, I had an opportunity to sit down with Dawn and Tom Wolthuis for an informal interview. Highlights included watching TV news coverage as Pope Francis was declared the newly-elected pontiff and dinner afterwards at Paddy Flaherty's, an Irish pub on the St. Clair River.

Some of our readers might not be familiar with ICS. Can you give us a brief description?

Tom: ICS has been around for 45 years. It started out of a movement of Dutch immigrants who said, "OK, we're in a new nation. How do we address this culture?" With a worldview that came out of the Kuyperian tradition and the philosophy associated with that, they started bringing in students in the late 1960s. 1967 is often considered the first academic year. It was a movement that was heading towards being a school, and it's always kept those kinds of dynamics. By the mid-80s, supporters said, "We need more school structure." They started instructing students in philosophy worldview studies that were basically trying to say, "OK, how does Christianity address the culture you live in? What are the structures of this culture and how does Christianity engage in it?" That's been at the heart of ICS and what we want very much to see continue.

Dawn: ICS is the only Reformed Christian graduate school in North America that exists as a graduate school only. It offers a PhD, a Masters Degree and a Masters of Worldview Studies in a variety of areas. It's a school, and it's also a scholarly place where people are doing research into the big questions. Given that we believe in God, given that we believe that Christ is Lord over everything, how does that play out, how does that work out in the world – so we have Masters Degrees, for example, related to education, justice and the public space, art, religion, theology and interdisciplinary philosophy.

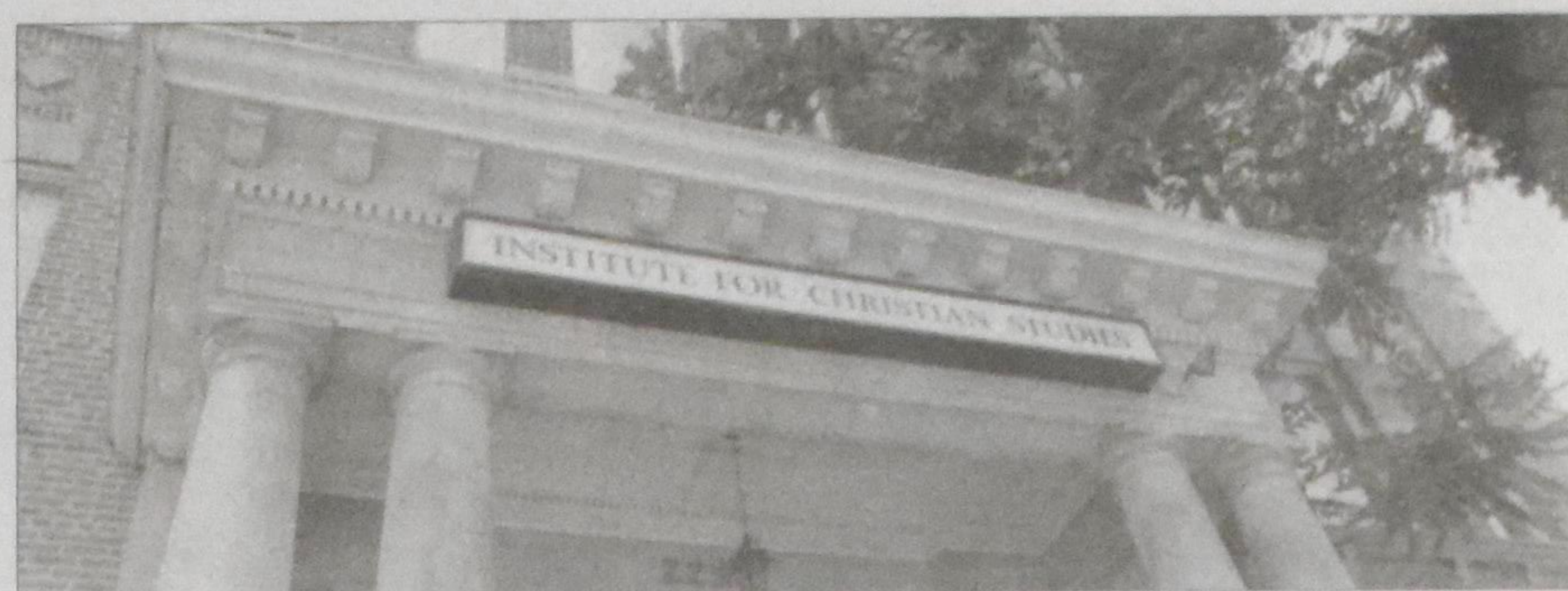
What was appealing about the position of President? What contributed to your decision to take on this role?

Dawn: It's a challenging position. There are challenges in any educational institution today and it's in an area that I've been looking at – where is education going, higher education particularly, in light of emerging technologies and communities? How do you do any type of communication and community building in light of new technologies? My focus in the field of information technology has been higher education, so, when this opportunity was brought to us, I thought, "It looks like it would be very exciting. It looks like a challenge, but it looks like an adventure where we could make a contribution with our different skill sets."

Tom: I've served both in churches and in colleges. I've always had a foot in both worlds. Twenty years ago I was doing some personal reflection as part of a church pastors' group and was asked, "Where would you like to be in 20 years?" and I said, "I think I'd like to lead a school because I want to take the experience of being in a church and the experience of teaching and I'd like to help direct that." Dawn will say that I have leadership capabilities, so much so that I will even lead if I don't know where I'm going [laughs]. I like to help people get excited about where we're going and set forth a vision, communicating that and making change. At this point, with a lot of experiences behind me, it's kind of a great opportunity to take those together, combining the academics and the church work, to lead an organization that has a lot of wonderful history and great resources. To say, "OK, what's the next stage?" It feels really good.

What goals do you have for ICS?

Tom: One goal is to give ICS a sustainable future. To get it on good solid financial foundation, that's one element of it, and also, to get to the point that it has a well-communicated mission. What do we really want to do? Why is it important to do what we're doing? Expanding beyond that – to re-engage the church, to re-connect to the church. The church has played a significant role; the Christian community has played a significant role. We want to get the Christian community excited again about affecting society through education, through worldview approaches. Because it's so needed. We were talking to someone today who commented that so many people are just lost, and not just in that religious sense, lost from salvation, but they're just without identity, without focus, without direction in life. And that's what the Kuyperian tradition has given us



so strongly, the tradition of what's been behind ICS. It's so strong in terms of "What's your identity and purpose in the world?" It's so desperately needed. We want to find ways to get the church excited about that and then broadcast it more widely to the world.

Dawn: I've been there for only two and a half months, so I don't have a "Here's exactly where we want to head" statement. I like to paint pictures of the future. What I'm doing now is listening to a variety of input. We've talked to Board members, we've talked to U.S. constituents and Canadian churchgoers, people from the scholarly world, as well as the faculty, staff and students at ICS. We're doing a lot of listening right now and have received lots of input. Pictures are emerging. With the Board, faculty and staff we are pursuing some new opportunities and ideas on all three fronts: education, research and community outreach.

But if I were to pick a few goals – we'd like to expand our educational offerings, so that we're not just focused on scholarly philosophers, but that we attract more of the people who have come to the Institute over the years, such as preachers, teachers and public servants. Really anyone from any walk of life or profession who could be helped by exploring a basic worldview perspective. As Tom said, the identity thing is critical – Who are we? What are we here for? Those are some basic questions that people can struggle and work through at ICS. There's some great scholarship and great thinking and community going on at ICS. So I'd like to see more of that branching out in the future. And, yes, sustainability is very important for moving forward.

You are recent immigrants to our country. What are your impressions of Canada so far?

Dawn: I love it. I tell people that I still feel like I'm on vacation. I'm in the big city! Not all of Canada is "the big city" as I understand it [grinning]. As you try to make your way through the immigration bureaucracy, there are certain chal-

lenges. There are impressions that we've gained from that experience that would be less than favourable, but on the whole, we're definitely enjoying Canada. We miss our friends, but we are enjoying the people here.

Tom: Every eight to 10 years I seem to take on a new adventure. This is a wonderful adventure that I go at with a sense of learning and exploring, letting it affect and change my perspective. That's what I love. I'm seeing another element of culture – a much more cosmopolitan community. That raises a lot of questions. How does a Christian live in this more pluralistic place? In Canada, we've noticed, there's an interesting different way that religion functions in political life than in the States. There is a greater political secularity in some ways. It doesn't have some of the same tensions that the U.S. has among religious conservatives, but there's a little bit of an anti-religious attitude in government or society that is an interesting challenge that we're going to have to explore. What does that mean for ICS and for ourselves as Christians here in this community? But I love meeting the world in Toronto, seeing the variety of God's world, being led to be much more open and accepting of that variety. God seems to have created it that way. He likes variety. To explore that, learn from that, appreciate it. Having good open dialogue with people with different experiences, different ways they approach the world. It opens up so many more possibilities for discussion, contribution and growth.

Have you been able to find a home church community or are you still looking?

Tom: That's a bit of a struggle, in part because I'm an ordained pastor and I'm

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Cathy Smith (left) with Dawn (centre) and Tom Wolthuis.

Features

Abraham Kuyper and art

Bert den Boggende

In the summer of 1975, while writing a UBC art history thesis on the portraits by the German-Flemish artist Hans Memling (c.1433-1494), I became intrigued by the theological issue of the human being as the image of God (*imago dei*). I decided to pursue this issue at Regent College where I became acquainted with Abraham Kuyper's *Lectures on Calvinism*. His discussion on the theory of beauty was unhelpful for my research and my thesis indicated that he had a flawed understanding of art history.

Art theory

In his lecture *Calvinism and Art* Kuyper defined art as the embodiment of beautiful thought in sensuous form. God originated art and, as God's image bearers, humans, although they possess the ability to create something beautiful and to delight in it, can only imitate his handiwork; hence, the beautiful is not a product of our fantasy. Art, he posited, was one of God's richest gifts and beautiful art had an eternal significance, having the noble vocation of disclosing to humans a higher reality. Artists, therefore, should concern themselves with making something that is beautiful, especially earthly beauty which is a reflection in creation of God's glory and splendour. Kuyper regarded glory as the highest form of beauty.

However, while realists, who imitated nature artistically, failed to augment "those earthly lines and tints with deeper, richer beauty" that transcended the beauty of nature, idealist art, which often did not adhere to the forms and motions of nature, deteriorated into a wild play of fantasy. The vulgarization of nineteenth century art, he complained, was due to the *profanum vulgus*' homage of art that necessarily

led to art corruption and poor production of real creative art.

Influenced by Plato, Augustine and Renaissance humanists, Kuyper, and with him Dooyeweerd and Rookmaaker, made beauty the decisive feature in art. Seerveld has persuasively argued against this Platonic dogma. In 1971 I had an opportunity to see Picasso's *Guernica*, then still in New York's Museum of Modern Art. Its distorted forms made a powerful impression on me – Seerveld called such distortion "awe at the terribleness of sin" – and I realized that this art had a prophetic message, a topic Kuyper is totally silent about. In other words, there is much more to art than Kuyper indicated in his theory. Having said this, it is to Kuyper's credit that he regarded art as "no fringe that is attached to the garment, and no amusement that is added to life, but a most serious power in our present existence." Many Christian educators in the Netherlands and Canada regarded math and language as core subjects and relegated art to the fringe. Many Christians – and non-Christians – still do.



The young Abraham Kuyper.

Calvinism and art

In 1873 and again in his 1898 Stone lecture, Kuyper tried to explain why Calvinism was not able to develop its own religious art style and, additionally, what Calvinism had done for the advancement of art. Calvinism's conception of religious liberty, he argued, resulted in the abandonment of the symbolical form of worship and in the refusal to embody its religious spirit in monuments of splendour. The alliance of religion and art, he posited, represented a lower stage of religious and human development. Calvinism released religion and divine worship from its sensual form and encouraged its vigorous spirituality. Art al-

ways remained incapable of expressing the very essence of religion: "Religion and Art have each a life sphere of their own." Kuyper's emancipation of art from the tutelage of the church is laudatory, but he failed to consider Calvinism's frequent disdain for the arts.

Separating the arts from religion and the church did not imply a call for secular art. He regarded art independent of any religious principle as "simply absurd." Therefore 19th century efforts creating their own art style ended in perfect failure. While there were voices in the Reformed community who regarded art as contrary to the second commandment, Kuyper, citing Calvin's support, considered the arts as given for our comfort, the Holy Spirit's gifts and forms of common grace.¹ In fact, "all the arts come from God and are to be respected as Divine inventions." Art, he suggested, had the mystical task of reminding us in its productions of the beautiful what was lost, namely paradise, and of anticipating its perfect coming lustre.

Several characteristics were needed to make art true to Calvinism: free from ecclesiastical and political control, beautiful, obedient to classical norms; attentive to the significance of the commonplace and the ordinary. The inclusion of the arts, he hoped, would strengthen his case for Calvinism as a worldview.

Views on contemporary art

Kuyper characterized contemporary art as decadent, as adoring the immanent, as an expression of the materialistic culture, fanatic and withered. Its excesses indicated an atrophy of the heart and its enjoyment a substitute for religion. People, he complained, wanted to be knowledgeable



The Arnolfini Double Portrait, Jan van Eyck.

about the latest developments in literature, theater and painting, so that they could talk the artistic fashion and swoon about a mystical experience. This mass interest in art led to its vulgarization. He directed his critique at naturalism with its new art forms, perhaps best exemplified for the readers by Vincent van Gogh. The problem was especially clear in the theater: playing someone else's character could inculcate insincerity, causing character corruption, impersonality and immorality. The theater was nothing but hypocrisy. A similar attitude was apparent against novels, regarded as a product of degenerate French culture, a concoction of lies.

Kuyper wrote rarely about art. In 1898 his replacements at *De Standaard* wrote several articles about culture and the arts. In line with Kuyper, they were negative toward modern art. However, Kuyper did not represent all Reformed folk, as Dr. J.H. Gerretson's 1897 appreciative essay about modern painting indicates.

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New Adventures: an interview ...continued from p.10

going to be out there preaching. I enjoy doing that greatly. I like to go to other churches and preach. We had this already in Iowa. I was out preaching in different communities. For about three years, we helped plant a church in Iowa, so it became kind of a church home. We don't foresee doing that here. What we have done for the first two and a half months now was basically go to different churches around the Toronto area, not doing the church shopping thing, but just learning what the different churches look like and what do different parts of the community

look like, and that's been a great experience. I could do that for a while, but then you don't make those friendships, those connections. You don't feel like you're contributing to a community. We're going to wrestle with that, I think.

Please share with our readers something about your personal interests outside of your professional life. What brings you joy and recharges your energies?

Dawn: [Laughing] I like talking about religion and politics! I also like films and I like comedy. Of course, I like my children

and grandchildren and parents, family and friends.

Tom: For me, replenishing is physical outdoor activity. I'm not a fan of winter, so why couldn't ICS be in a nice warm tropical climate? [Chuckling]. Why did so many Dutch immigrants move to places with weather as miserable as the Netherlands? Grey and cloudy and rainy? And snowy?

I'm looking forward to spring. We live right on a bike trail. I'm looking forward to riding my bike on the Humber River trails. That will be really great fun for me. When I was young, I played a lot of sports

and I still golf. Not sure I can afford to golf in Toronto. (More chuckling). I'm hoping I can get together with some friends for some golfing.

Cathy: Thank you very much for this interview! I appreciate your willingness to sit down with me, introduce yourselves to our CC readers and share stories, hopes and dreams.

Cathy Smith is feature editor with Christian Courier. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.



Features

Why I left the Christian Reformed Church

Jason Postma

I've thrown in the towel. I've given up trying to be an agent of positive change in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in Canada. I left because I realized that the effort was too taxing on me personally and spiritually. I left because I was disheartened by the personal attacks and criticism that I, along with the senior pastor and council, faced while trying to lead a re-visioning process. We were trying to align ourselves with God's activity in our neighbourhood; we bathed the re-visioning in prayer. But only the Holy Spirit brings transformation; if people are not in step with the Spirit, then transformation cannot occur.

In my experience in three CRC congregations, I have seen this transformation occur in individuals but not on a congregational or denominational level. Maybe I am being impatient. Yet in my experience, the Canadian CRC is very good at rearranging the furniture and putting on fresh coats of paint. But all this does is cover up underlying problems, and – even worse – it ignores the Spirit's leading.

I realize that this is a damning statement to which many will take offense. Despite all the talk of discerning God's will, the fact is that the real issues get buried under endless discussion. No fruit develops. Structural tweaks and changes are suggested. Administrative solutions are assumed to be the fix-all. But the result is always the same: those who are leading the charge for change get burnt out and frustrated with short-sightedness precisely because the structural problems are rooted in spiritual problems.

From my perspective, the root of the spiritual problem lies in an unwillingness to allow the Holy Spirit to completely transform everything. This is not to say that everything in the Canadian CRC is broken and needs to be changed. The problem is the stubborn refusal to offer up everything at our disposal and place it into God's hands, and then to align ourselves with the new things that he is doing (cf. Isaiah 43:19).

Here are, briefly, a few areas that I think urgently need transformation.

PA prayer

I have always struggled with what it means to pray as a Calvinist. If God has preordained everything from eternity, then what is the point of prayer? Is it merely some-

thing that we are supposed to do as good Christians, so we best get on with it as an act of grateful piety? These are the kinds of questions that I was asked time and again by students who were struggling with what it means to pray.

I realize that there are sophisticated theological arguments to these questions, which I'm not going to bother re-hashing here. The point is that growing up in the CRC I had the sense that prayer didn't really matter. It was something that good families did before and after meals and on Sunday mornings. Ultimately, I concluded that prayer was ultimately an act of submission to whatever God has predestined.

The CRC is simply not a praying church. Hopefully the recently created Annual Prayer Summit will serve as a signpost for the future direction of the denomination, as long as it can influence and impact local congregations.

We need prayer to be more than a PA system for the congregation to catch up on the list of folks who may be sick or in some kind of trouble. We need to replace some council meeting discussions with prayer. We need elders willing to take the lead in prayer. We need to listen to God more than we talk to and at each other.

Culture gap

The Canadian CRC has a culture problem. I'm not referring to ethnicity. I mean the way our church understands and defines itself, its behaviours, and the way it does things and how it relates to the surrounding culture.

Strengths and weaknesses can be linked. This is true of the CRC's strengths. This denomination is remarkably well-organized and administered. Consequently, we've built a culture of management rather than visionary leadership. The role of pastors and elders is to ensure that members are happy and that the pews and coffers are full. Spirit-led vision takes a back seat.

The CRC has an excellent intellectual heritage and is known for its rigorous theological tradition. This often manifests itself in sectarianism and, painfully, in schism after schism over theological minutiae. To be honest, I'm tired of the fights about doctrine, about evolution vs. creationism, about women in leadership, about worship styles. It doesn't take a stretch of the imagination to picture what will happen when the LGBT "issue" inevitably hits the floor at Synod.

The CRC has a strong ethnic heritage [Dutch] that has contributed to its ability to build remarkable institutions. However, we also have a hospitality problem. Others have a difficult time fitting in. The Canadian CRC must get over its immigrant mentality and start thinking of itself in terms of a Canadian church, not as a Dutch Church in Canada. This means embracing multiculturalism and removing those barriers by which the Canadian CRC seeks to isolate itself from the surrounding Canadian culture. Don't burn the wooden shoes; just display them less often and less prominently. Figure out what it means to do ministry in and for a Canadian context. Dismantle a few sacred cows in the name of contextualization.



Divisions in the church.

Election trumps evangelism

I find spiritual growth and nourishment through theology. The larger Reformed tradition has positively shaped me in that regard. But I struggle with that linchpin of Reformed theology, the doctrine of election (and not for lack of study). My problem is not with election itself but with how it is linked to an individualist soteriology rooted in double predestination. I cannot and will not accept double predestination on any theological grounds. Perhaps double predestination is God's method of election (he reserves that right). However, it is not part of my Christian confession. And its implications become this: "The church does not need to evangelize because the doors of the church are always open – the elect will find their way in here if they are truly elect." Ideas have legs, and the legs of double predestination are theological mutations that fundamentally undermine the electing purposes of God in and through the church.

Divided over Christian schools

Christian schools are central to the identity of the CRC: attendance is required of pastors' children and expected of laity. Parents who send their children to public or Catholic school and those who homeschool are chastised for abdicating responsibility as Christians. This leads to a great deal of emotional pain. Teachers in the public school system feel alienated by negative comments about public schooling and belittled for their choices.

The problem is the way that Christian schools are self-righteously assumed to be the only real option for Christian parents. Furthermore, Christian schools also tend to stand in the way of mission in terms of the prohibitive cost of tuition and in terms of the inadvertent isolationist posture it engenders toward Canadian culture. It would be wonderful to see a CRC congregation continue to support its local Christian school while simultaneously supporting a local public school as well.

Some will undoubtedly disagree with my conclusions. I'm OK with that. I admit that I could be completely wrong on everything. The most difficult part in leaving is what you leave behind. And there are wonderful things about the CRC that will continue to positively shape me.

To be clear, I didn't leave the CRC in search of the "perfect church." I'm not naïve enough to think that such a thing exists. I left because God was calling me elsewhere. My reasons are personal, rooted in my own perspective and experience. I left because I was confident that God would direct me where he wanted me to be in order to best use my gifts in service of his kingdom.

Jason Postma resigned as a Youth Pastor in the CRC last fall. He is currently completing his M.Div at Wycliffe College with the goal of ordination in the Anglican Church of Canada. He blogs at rootedradical.wordpress.com



What is God doing in the neighbourhood?

Columns

Intangible Things

Heidi Vander Slikke



Of alligators and sovereignty



While I hesitate to say we “needed” a holiday, Jack and I both looked forward to time away. We planned to tow the motorbikes to a warmer climate and enjoy a break from winter.

Florida welcomed us with blue skies and record breaking warmth. We spent two days riding through the central state, inhaling the glorious scent of orange groves. Then it was time to park the motorbikes and move to Orlando to take in the National Ligonier Conference.

From Thursday through Saturday we listened to a host of topnotch speakers, including Ravi Zacharias, Cal Thomas and R. C. Sproul. Manoeuvring through the packed facility wasn’t so much fun, but singing hymns with 5,000 people accompanied by a symphony orchestra was a little taste of heaven.

When the conference ended we picked up the motorbikes and moved to the north end of Tampa, to a lovely hotel nestled into a quiet area. From this location we could easily tour in any direction, taking in some of the finest scenery Florida’s back roads have to offer.

Behind the hotel was a small pond, completely enclosed by a 10 foot chain link fence. I assumed the fence was to keep people from inadvertently wandering into the water. I walked past every day, never paying much attention to the old black tire tread floating among the lily pads.

Then one morning I read the faded sign affixed to the fence: “Warning! In the interest of public safety, Florida law prohibits feeding alligators. Violators will be prosecuted.”

I shook my head. Who would be dumb enough to feed an alligator? What alligator? And then I took a closer look at that old tire tread floating so serenely on the pond. It was actually the tail of a real live gator. From the tip of its snout to the end of its tail, the creature was probably about seven feet long. I tried to take a picture, but the chain link fence interfered. I was okay with that. We saw hundreds of them when we rode along Alligator Alley last year in the Everglades, but I’d never seen one this close up before. With morbid fascination I stood safely on my side of the fence and studied this grim looking reptile.

Fear underfoot

As a child I had recurrent nightmares about alligators. I used to dream that my brother brought home a

baby gator and deposited it into the bathtub. It grew to monstrous proportions overnight and developed an appetite for little girls. I often woke up in a cold sweat, frozen with fear that the beast was hiding in my room. Now as I sat in the sunshine by the hotel pool, the gator securely contained, I thought of those silly childhood fears, and how thankful I was that I no longer suffered from such groundless anxiety. Or do I?

I may not be outrunning predators in my dreams anymore, or checking under the bed when I wake up, but life is full of alligators, isn’t it? They’re not imaginary but metaphorical instead. They lurk, often undetected in the day to day routines. At first glance they’re like some ubiquitous log or piece of debris, but all of a sudden they lunge forward with life threatening force. Maybe they take the form of health issues or deadly disease, financial distress, job loss, broken relationships, substance abuse, addictions or the challenges of aging. Everyone has their own unique set of alligators to deal with.

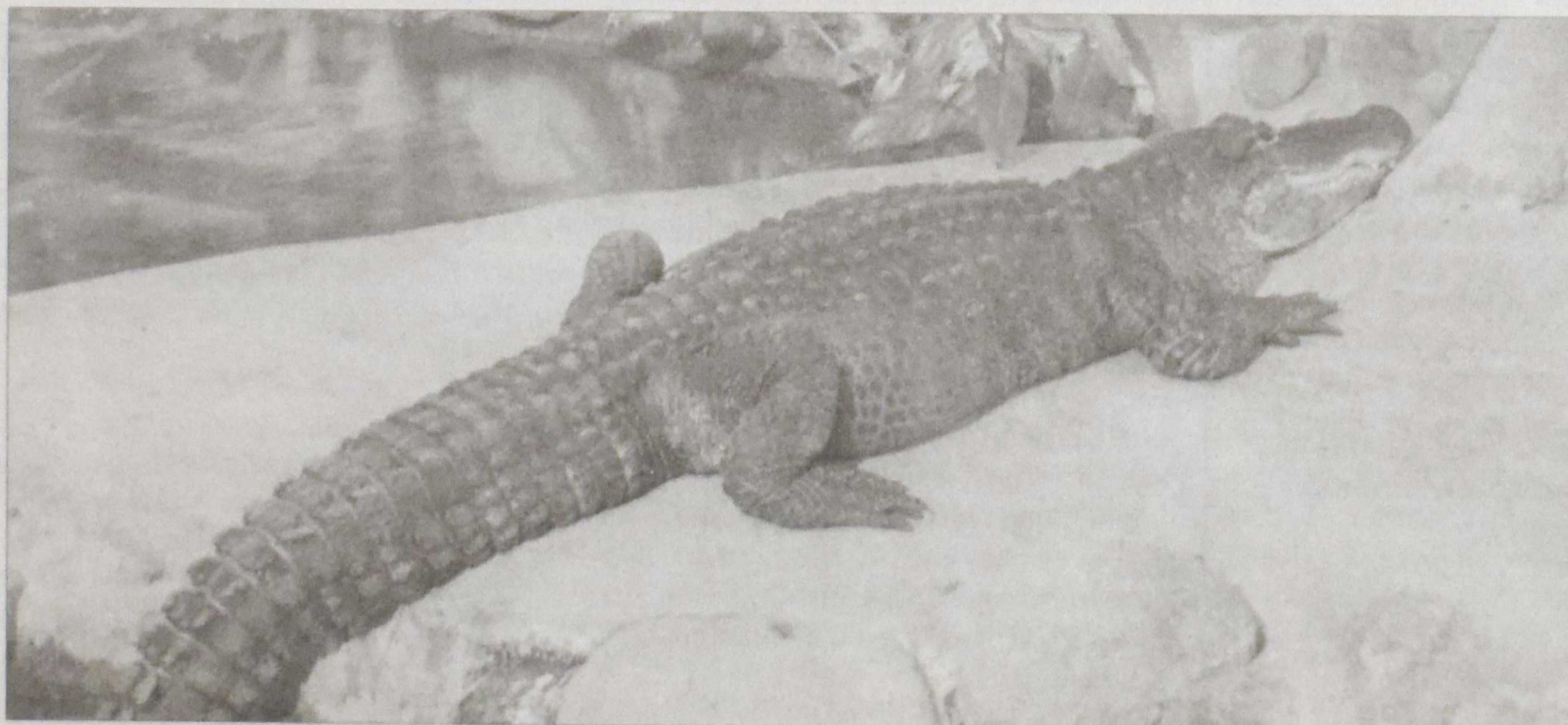
Our holidays passed by quickly. I wished they would never end, but at the same time I had the need to go home, back to where I belong. Willene sent pictures of the grandkids. I longed to feel their little arms around my neck again. Jack called home now and then. Mom informed us of the latest snowstorms. A few emails from my sister-in-law alluded to something not quite right with my brother.

We arrived home safely right after another snowstorm had passed through Ontario. By the back door a snowman greeted us, complete with a special letter to Nana and Poppa in a baggie dangling from his stick arm.

The next day my sister-in-law called to tell me that my brother has an aggressive and deadly form of cancer.

Alligators are dangerous, powerful and unpredictable. They warrant caution and due respect. But a person can’t live in constant fear of encountering the next monster. There’s one more thing to consider about gators – they’re God’s creatures. Someday in glory I’ll ask him what good purpose they serve. But rest assured, they do serve a purpose. For now, as our family faces this latest vicious misery, I’ll try to feed my heart, mind and soul instead of feeding the alligator. After all, I know who has it under control. ➤

Heidi Vander Slikke (hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com)
lives in Harriston, Ont.



Artful Eye



PHOTOGRAPH BY JOE VELTMAN

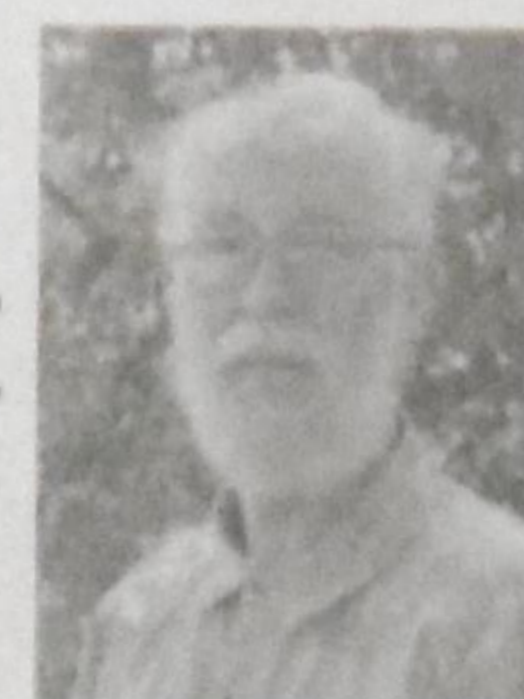
The Master’s Course

O dying Master remembered,
bring us near
to sit at your feet
by that strangest of trees
where your love’s blood,
still hot and steaming
with your life,
like lava coursed
down the mountainside
to burn men’s sin
to snowwhite ashes of repentance.

O crucified Christ,
call to mind
where your life’s waters
flowed glistening from your pierced side
to stream down from
Calvary to Jerusalem and earth’s end
to anoint the seeds of eternal life
and fruitfulness.

O living Lord,
lift us up
and draw us deep
into your heart,
and pour us hotly out
to follow the course
of your love
for all humankind;
and if we will not go
pierce us
with the sword of life
to flow fresh from your side
for the greening of your kingdom.

Joe Veltman is the pastor at
Calvary Community Church, New
Berlin, Wis. He enjoys painting, photography and writing poetry.



Columns

Borderless

Brent van Staaldhuizen



In a few short days, we will begin, rechristened.

There will be a blank slate of little girl, naked and crying, waiting for a name.

We'll brand her, then, probably with the name we fell in love with, perhaps with the one we hold in reserve if the first one doesn't quite fit. Maybe neither. She won't care, really, she'll just be blinded by all of that crazy light, deafened by the sounds of her new place, hungry as a micro mastodon, aching for our warmth.

And we'll be changed, too, rebranded in equally impacting measure. Our family's mission, its *raison d'être*, will shift again, from teaching abroad to reclaiming a life in Canada, this time adding a plus one and the devastating responsibility of helping such a little person survive. One need at a time.

I'll take on the name Dad.

Renamed

In childhood, your name is just your name, invisible, almost. But when you take on a name later in life, can you help but be aware of it? By the time I arrived on the scene, tucked in behind a sister and brother, my parents had grown into their identity well, as far as I can recall. Mom. Dad. (I don't remember ever calling them Mommy or Daddy, but I probably did.) They certainly wear it well now.

I wonder how often it hits them how big that is, really, whether now, well settled into grandparentdom, they shake their heads in wonder that they were allowed to rebrand themselves as parents at all. That God, in his omniscience, nodded lovingly and gave permission to take my older sister as their own and in that same moment take on the names Mom and Dad. And then rebrand them thrice again with a couple of quirky sons and another strong daughter.

They're thoughtful souls, so I'm betting they do.

The names we carry

I hope the pride I place in my names isn't the bad kind, because Mom and Dad did really well with them. My first name is Dad's first name, an undefinable honour and responsibility. And the other one, the one everyone knows me by, carries a

Marked

blessing far beyond a unique arrangement of letters or coolness or trendy glint. Brent means "Fire." I've been branded with fire. Like a glowing coal on my lips.

The siblings, all bearing strong names, will know this feeling too. Like me, they move through their lives with names that evidence our parents' love and best hopes for us. Names chosen to set us apart. Well travelled names. Names with meaning and weight. History. Love.

And expectation. Mom and Dad took us, bald and squalling and clueless, and christened us to bear not only the family legacy but first and foremost the message of Christ. That being called parents blessed them with the responsibility to give us good names that would bear every Bible lesson, loving correction, argument, tearful milestone and joyful hurrah. Infused, in my case, with the faith and grace of two loving Christians who knew what a big deal it was to be rebranded Mother and Father.

Who know still, I'm sure.

Waiting for a name

And now me. Us.

There is a daughter waiting to be born. We will pray over her and name her, brand her into our family, into the big sloppy family of humanity and the even messier family of faith. She will burst into the world, grow, tumble and reach, hopefully make more good choices than poor ones.

There is a hope and prayer that she'll bear her parent-given name past her baptism and to a thirsty world, across oceans and streets. When she will rebrand herself through whatever adventures and steps to which she is called. But that although she will be marked by the name of her parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, the body of believers, that her name is above all given to her as a loan. That her name, our name, isn't really hers or ours at all.

There is the hope that every name she gives, every brand she gains will be as prayer-filled as the one with which we'll christen her. As filled with God as ours are. As evidence that ours is the brand of our heavenly parents, which we are called to bear with every halting step. ➤

Brent and his wife Rosalee now live in the Westdale neighborhood of Hamilton, Ont. and are expecting their first child. To find out more about Brent and his writing, visit brentvans.com.



Roots and Wings

Emily Cramer



The highlight of my week happened on Thursday, when my husband reminded me that I would be unable to attend a bridal shower to which I'd just been invited. The relief was profound; I felt lightened, like I had shucked off a second skin of anxiety. After a couple days of hunting for fair reasons that might prevent me from going – and even waking in the small hours the night before and deciding that, yes, I had to go, it was important that I go – here was a simple, legitimate out. I'd forgotten a prior commitment on that very day at the very same time. It was fantastic. I was jubilant.

This is not normal behaviour, I realize. It's right up there with my impulse to hurriedly steer my shopping cart in the opposite direction when I see someone I know at the grocery store. And my dread of the annual neighbourhood barbecue. And my tendency to shuffle into my coat, grab my kid from the nursery and head straight out the door as soon as church is done. It is the characteristic I have struggled with most throughout my life, a part of my personality that seems to have no social and little spiritual value – a liability in most ways it can be considered. It is a tendency to introversion, and I would happily unload it given the chance.

A cartoon called "Guide to Understanding the Introverted" recently circulated Facebook and proved to be a huge source of entertainment to my extroverted husband. It explained that "Extroverted people gather their energy from their surroundings. They absorb the 'good vibes' of the people around them and thus they need a lot of social interaction. Introverted people make their own energy and, rather than taking it from others, they 'give' it on social contact. This means that they naturally find most interaction exhausting and need time to recharge." The cartoon pictures an introvert curled up inside a hamster ball, hissing at the extrovert outside who is scratching to get in.

To be clear, introverts need and love people. It is not disinterest or superiority that keeps us off on our own, it is just the enormous amount of energy social interactions require. I cherish time with my loved ones and often long to develop new meaningful friendships. But the prospect of building those relationships can be daunting.

Together alone

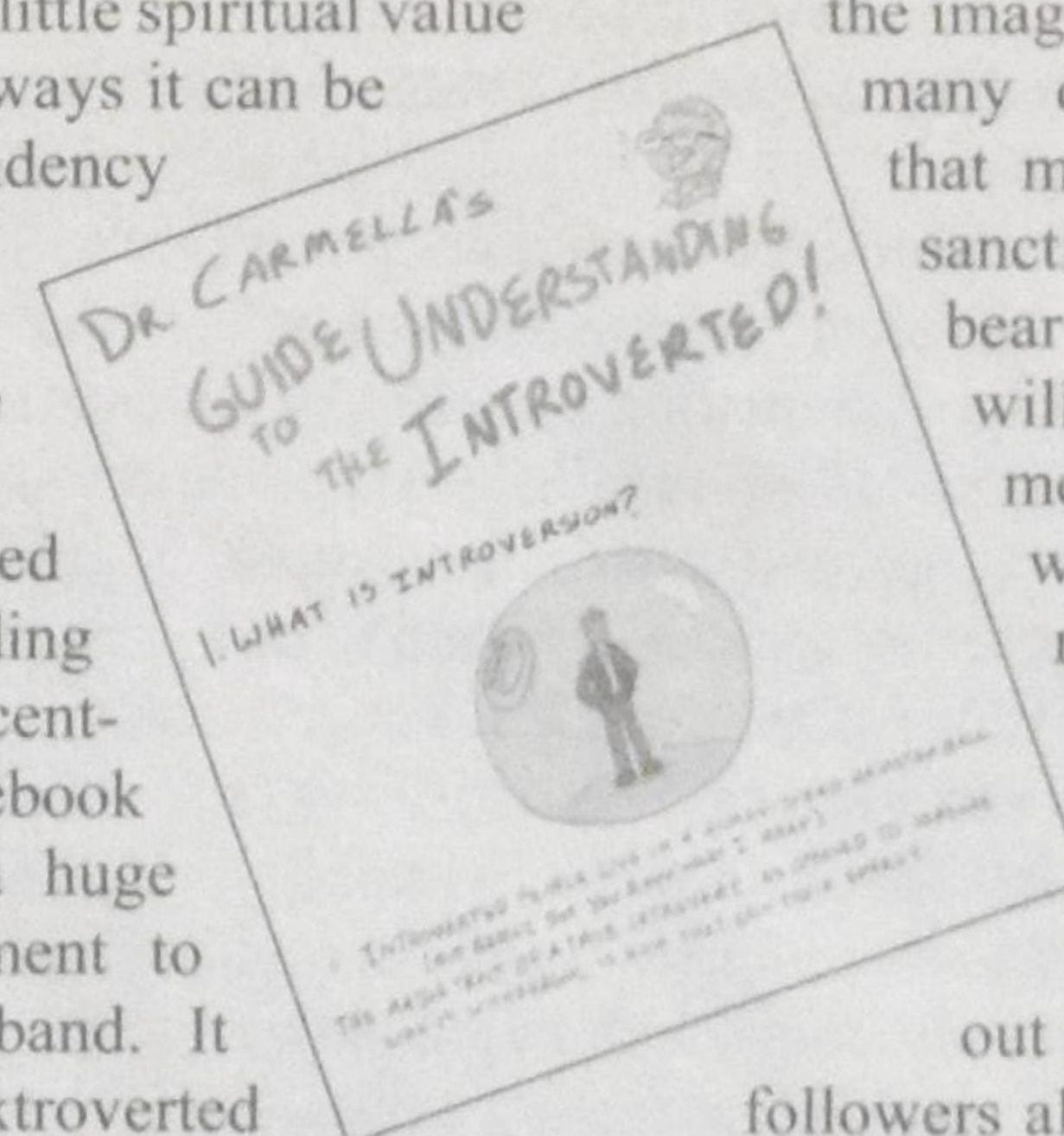
Apart and a part of

My introverted friends express a familiar struggle with trying to understand their roles in the church and even in faith. How is one to connect to a congregation without coffee *kletzing* in the fellowship hall after service, without church picnics and fellowship dinners and getting involved in small groups? How is one to live out a gospel of service without being readily available to people at all times? How is one to take part in the Body from the safe confines of an interesting thought life? I am overstating my case, as I think introverts in particular deeply value close relationships, especially those with spiritual connections. But we sometimes discuss, with longing, the cloisters and hermitages of earlier Christianity and the extent to which silence and solitude were considered earmarks of a rich spiritual life. There is not a great deal of room for reflection in today's highly communicative context.

I have not found a way to resolve these concerns, nor have I found a way to relieve my feelings of guilt and inadequacy over failing to live my faith in a way that seems legitimate. I cling to the image of a Body made up of many different parts, hoping that my part is in fact God-sanctioned and will one day bear fruit. Or perhaps God will work such change in me that I will come to welcome the roles I currently avoid. At least in this I'm probably in good company, for whether or not there are many introverts out there, aren't we Christ

followers all working out our callings with fear and trembling, walking that thread-thin line between the Lord's affirmation and correction? Thomas Merton captured this struggle perfectly when he wrote, "Oh Lord God, I have no idea where I am going . . . Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following Your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. . . ." Maybe to desire God's will is the most we can ever offer. ➤

Emily Cramer lives in Barrie, Ont. with her husband and daughter and teaches in the Liberal Arts department at Georgian College. She has just finished, and is still thinking about, James Baldwin's sad novel, Go Tell it on the Mountain.



Columns

Principalities
& Powers

David Koyzis



Singing the Psalms through adversity – in Turkish!



God's people have sung the Psalms for millennia, especially in dark times when it seems that he has abandoned them. One young man nearly 400 years ago found himself in a horribly difficult situation. His name was Wojciech Bobowski (c. 1610-1675), a Polish Reformed Christian who at the age of 18 (or perhaps as old as 28, depending on the year of his birth) was kidnapped by the Tatars during one of their occasional raids into his homeland. Sources differ on his birthplace, some pointing to the village of Bobowa (hence Bobowski) and others to Lwów (now Lviv, Ukraine). During his childhood and early youth, he had come to know the Bible thoroughly and to sing the Genevan Psalms, apparently in his native language.

Because Bobowski was intellectually brilliant and an accomplished musician and linguist, the Tatars sold him as a slave to the Ottoman Sultan. In an act reminiscent of Pharaoh's promotion of the biblical Joseph, the Sultan recognized his gifts and elevated him to the positions of court musician, treasurer and translator. Bobowski at least nominally converted to Islam and came to be known as Ali Ufki. Yet even if his conversion was genuine, he did not leave behind his interest in, and apparent love for, the Bible, which he translated into the Turkish language, in which it came to be known as *Kitabi Mukaddes*, or "Holy Book." Well into the 20th century Ali Ufki's Bible was the only translation available in the Turkish language.

Ali Ufki also translated the Church of England's catechism and the works of Hugo Grotius and Jan Comenius into Turkish. He eventually gained his legal freedom and lived out his years in Egypt as a *dragoman*, or diplomatic interpreter.



A kidnapped Pole, Ali Ufki, translated the Genevan Psalms into Turkish.

Across boundaries

Yet it is his translation of the first fourteen Genevan Psalms into Turkish for which Ali Ufki is best remembered today. As it turns out, the distinctive modal flavour of the Genevan tunes made them well-suited for adaptation to the musical system used in the Ottoman Empire. This enabled him to publish his collection, *Mezmurlar* (Psalms), in 1665. We do not know whether he ever intended to translate the entire Psalter and, if so, why he stopped at 14. Nevertheless, in the first decade of this century increasing numbers of musical performing groups began paying attention to them.

For example, in 2005 the German musical group Sarband, in conjunction with the King's Singers, produced a recording titled, *Sacred Bridges: Christian, Jewish and Muslim Psalm Settings*. Featuring Ali Ufki's renditions of

Psalms 2, 5, 6, 7 and 9, most of which are sung in both French and Turkish, this recording brings together two quite divergent musical traditions, and the overall effect is little short of astounding. Employing Turkish instruments, Louis Bourgeois's sturdy tunes take on the unmistakable flavour of typical Near Eastern music. In fact, a youtube video performance of at least one of these comes complete with whirling dervishes, an addition that would leave the typical Dutch or Hungarian churchgoer reeling.

Other recent recordings include *The Psalms of Ali Ufki* and *One God: Psalms and Hymns from Orient & Occident*.

How well are Ali Ufki's Psalms known amongst contemporary citizens of the Turkish Republic? Turkey is, of course, a largely Muslim country with a secular constitution enforced by a nervous military fearful of traditional religious loyalties. Christians coexist uneasily under the secularizing régime in Ankara. Whether they sing from Ali Ufki's abbreviated Psalter I cannot say.

However, I received one more surprise in my research into Ali

Ufki. When I mentioned his name to my father, who was born in the Greek Orthodox community in Cyprus, he recognized it immediately and said that he knew his work well, especially his Turkish-language Bible.

It is commonly believed that western Asia Minor, heartland of today's Turkey, was the first place on earth to have a Christian majority during the Roman era. It would be marvellous if God, in his providence, saw fit to use Ali Ufki's *Mezmurlar* to advance his kingdom in this once but no longer Christian land.

David T. Koyzis has taught politics at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, for just over a quarter of a century. His next book on authority, office and the image of God is forthcoming from Pickwick Publications, a division of Wipf & Stock.



Country Living

Meindert Vander Galien



Farms across the world



Have you noticed that there is a lot of land clearing going on in the countryside? Scrubs, bush and fencerows are all being removed to enlarge the fields, utilizing every acre possible for growing crops. With record prices for cash-crops, especially soybeans, land values have soared so it makes sense to enlarge and square the fields. We are so lucky to have that freedom.

If you've traveled through some European countries, you'll see mostly small fields surrounded by fence rows, brush or trees. I have often asked myself why they don't remove those to make bigger fields. How can they farm such little, oddly shaped fields? I couldn't. A few years ago I toured a large beef operation in southern Finland and asked the tour guide and a farmer that question. The farmer had a thousand acres of land scattered in a three-mile radius. They had all kinds of modern machinery and a huge modern workshop, but they were farming tiny fields.

The answer was that if there's brush or trees surrounding a field, that's how it has to stay – as nature put it. It's the law.

Most European farms range in size from 30 to 50 acres, but that varies a great deal both within and between European countries. The smallest farms are in Norway and Switzerland, and the largest are in Germany and France. However, I was surprised to see a rather large, flat valley in Norway that was in grain production.

Denmark contains much flat or gentle rolling land, of which about 63 per cent is highly productive farmland. Canada and Finland are alike in that they have only about seven percent agricultural land. Sweden has eight percent, Israel 23 percent, Ethiopia 35 percent, Argentina 48 percent, France 53 percent, China 59 percent and India the highest at 60 percent.

About 11 percent of the earth's surface is used to grow crops, and about 27 percent is used to keep livestock and other food sources. Land that is used to grow crops is known as arable land, which is different from agricultural land. Agricultural land covers 33 percent of the world's land area, which includes arable land, land

used for growing fruit and land used for grazing livestock. Arable land represents 9.3 percent of the world's land area.

Water of life

Irrigated land is more than twice as productive as non-irrigated land and, in some cases, can increase crop yields by 400 percent. About 16 percent of croplands in the world are irrigated, which represents about two percent of the world's surface. These irrigated croplands produce about 40 percent of the world's food. At a recent visit to the Museum of Nature in Ottawa, I jotted down this gem: Every day, about 1.5 trillion litres of water falls to earth as rain, snow or hail. Most of it quickly evaporates and then forms clouds. The clouds eventually release the water, which returns to earth as some form of precipitation.

The United States has the most cultivated land in the world, with more than 650,000 square miles (about 1,700,000 square km) of land worked for food production – or about 18 percent of the country's total area. Twenty-four territories in the world have no cultivated land, including Monaco, Macau, Greenland, Iceland, Gibraltar and Christmas Island.

Which two countries do you think produce the most wheat? If you said the United States and Canada, you are wrong. They export the most wheat, but are way behind China and India for production. China is the top wheat grower at 115,115,364 MT (metric tons). India is next at 80,680,000 MT. China produces five times more wheat than Canada. Canada's production sits at 23,166,800 MT. But when it comes to the countries exporting wheat, China is in 16th place and India is in 8th place.

No wonder we're chopping down trees and expanding our agricultural land base!

Meindert van der Galien farms near Renfrew, Ont. His biggest field is 175 acres and could be bigger, but a creek runs down the length of the farm. It was all in wheat last year and produced a bumper crop.

News

Abraham Kuyper and art ...Continued from p.11

Kuyper's views on earlier art

Although lecturing at the Vrije Universiteit in esthetics, Kuyper's knowledge of art history was secondhand. Like the contemporary historian of the Renaissance, Jacob Burckhardt, Kuyper held that the Greeks' discovery of the fundamental laws of art remained tone-giving and forever dominant. He posited that as long as Christianity struggled with paganism, it was hostile to art.

However, as art in the catacombs indicates, this view needs to be modified. The church combated principally the liturgical use of artistic representation. According to Renaissance humanists, the Middle Ages were a degeneration of antiquity, a perspective still prevalent in the 19th century. Thus like Burckhardt, Kuyper argued that the Renaissance had loosened the Roman Catholic Church's grip on art, for until then art had confined itself to

the holy spheres, but since then had made its appearance in the social world. Pointing, among others, to Rembrandt (his model about whom a large exhibition was held in 1898 Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum) and the composer Goudimel, Kuyper posited that Calvinism in a peculiar sense had advanced the development in the arts.

By ignoring medieval art, rediscovered in the 19th century, Kuyper made significant mistakes. Many fifteenth-century patrons were demanding portraits and secular scenes. Jan van Eyck, for instance, painted the well-known Arnolfini double portrait. In 1428 his patron Philip the Good, sending an embassy to Portugal asking for the hand of a princess, ordered Van Eyck to paint her portrait. Italian town magistrates ordered representations of judgments, especially that of Paris, to decorate the law courts. In 1338-9, Ambrogio Lorenzetti frescoed his *Allegory of Good Government* on the wall

of Siena's city hall. Although most secular decorative art has been lost, we know that festivals contained mythological and allegorical works, some including low class comic elements. In painting and sculpture the nude became acceptable. Tomb sculptures were intended to glorify the dead. Already during the fourteenth century there was a decided shift in volume of production from sacred to secular music. For instance, of Guillaume de Machaut's (c.1300-1371) 140 surviving compositions, only seven are religious. In literature the profane genre preponderated. In other words, medieval courts and towns were already loosening the church's grip on the arts.

Concluding remarks

In confessing the arts as one of God's richest gift to mankind, Kuyper contributed to Reformed folk's receptivity of the arts. However, he remained uneasy about them, notably about their democratization. His esthetics,

influenced by Plato, Augustine and Renaissance humanists, was flawed. He claimed far too much for the Renaissance and the Reformation. As an historical figure speaking about the arts he is of some interest, but 21st century Christians are not well served by his views.

Endnotes

The 19th century naturalism to which Kuyper objected had its origin in the Middle Ages. It was, according to the well-known Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, one of the ultimate forms of development of the medieval mind, impressing people by the sanctity and dignity of the subject. Indeed, Flemish artists saw reality, like the medieval Nominalist philosophers, in individual persons and things in all their peculiarity, often painting nature, as well

as splendour and adornment, for their own sake. Michelangelo, who favoured symmetry and proportion, rejected such detailed Flemish art as too cluttered.

For a critique on common grace and the arts, see Jeremy Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991).

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Bert den Boggende passed away at his home in Brooks, Alberta on March 18, 2013. We at Christian Courier mourn his loss, but are comforted to know that he is now with God. Look for Bert Witvoet's tribute to this long-time Christian Courier contributor in the next issue.



Seeds from Anne Frank's tree bring message of tolerance

Pamela Engel

CSM – Saplings from the chestnut tree that stood as a symbol of hope for Anne Frank as she hid from the Nazis for two years in Amsterdam are being distributed to 11 locations in the United States as part of a project that aims to preserve her legacy and promote tolerance.

The tree, one of the Jewish teenager's only connections to nature while she hid with her family in a Secret Annex in her father's company building, was diseased and rotted through the trunk when wind and heavy rain toppled it in August 2010. But saplings grown from its seeds will be planted starting in April, when the Children's Museum of Indianapolis will put the first one in the ground.

The 11 U.S. locations, which also include a park memorializing victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack in New York City, an Arkansas high school that was the heart of the desegregation battle, and Holocaust centers in Michigan and Washington state, were chosen by The Anne Frank Center USA from 34 applicants.

Winners were selected based on their commitment to equal-



Actress Julie Mauro discusses the hiding place of Anne Frank with students in the Anne Frank exhibition at the Children's Museum in Indianapolis.

ity, demonstration of the consequences of intolerance, or historical significance to civil rights and social justice in the U.S., ac-

cording to a news release from the center.

Sign of hope

The tree is referenced several times in the diary that Anne Frank kept during the 25 months she remained indoors until her family was arrested in August 1944.

"Nearly every morning I go to the attic to blow the stuffy air out of my lungs," she wrote on Feb. 23, 1944. "From my favourite spot on the floor I look up at the blue sky and the bare chestnut tree, on whose branches little raindrops shine, appearing like silver, and at the seagulls and other birds as they glide on the wind."

A global campaign to save the chestnut was launched in

2007 after city officials deemed it a safety hazard and ordered it taken down. The tree was granted a last-minute reprieve after a battle in court, but age and nature ultimately brought it down.

The Anne Frank Center wants the sapling project to go beyond the initial planting of the trees. The center is launching an education initiative called Confronting Intolerance Today that will encompass a "teaching and discovery" website to create dialogue and show how the sites are using the sapling project to advance

tolerance, a distinguished speaker series, and temporary exhibits from the center that will show the history of Anne Frank.

"We know that the tree was a sign of hope for Anne Frank, who was unable to leave her living quarters," said Yvonne Simons, executive director of The Anne Frank Center USA. "She wrote about it in a diary. For us, the tree portrays a symbolism of hope and growth and renewal."

Pamela Engel is a freelance writer. Her article appeared in Christian Science Monitor (CSM).



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from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*
Psalm 90:2

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April 19, 2013

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Event



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Obituary

Willem Bernard Groot-Nibbelink

January 3, 1926 – February 25, 2012

*You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me into glory.
Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire but you.*
Psalm 73: 24-25

Our husband, Dad and Opa, Bernard Groot-Nibbelink,
was called home to be with his Lord and Saviour on
Monday, Feb. 25, 2013, at 87 years of age.

Beloved husband of Grada Groot-Nibbelink (Heide-
man) for over 60 years.

Loving father of:

Bill & Tena Groot-Nibbelink of Frankford, Ont.
Eric & Carolyn Groot-Nibbelink of Dorchester, Ont.
Elna Groot-Nibbelink of Bloomfield, Ont.

Dearly loved Opa of: Sarah-Joy & Adam Harris
(Jonathan); Jenica Groot-Nibbelink; Michelle Groot-
Nibbelink; Nathan Groot-Nibbelink; Christy Groot-
Nibbelink and Carissa Groot-Nibbelink.

Correspondence: Grada Groot-Nibbelink
15146 Loyalist Parkway
R.R.2
Bloomfield ON K0K1G0

Obituary

Dirk Nicolaas Habermehl

passed into the loving arms of God suddenly, on March 22, 2013, in his 85th year.

Beloved husband and soulmate of Martha Habermehl (nee Kruisshoop) for nearly 60 years.
Loving father of Johanna (Henry) Wiersma, Marion (Gary Duim) Habermehl, and Patricia Haber-
mehl. Deeply caring grandfather (opa) of Janita (Josh) Noiseux-Wiersma, Julian, Daniel, and Oriah
Wiersma, Gared and Rowan Duim, and Patrice Smith.

Dik was born in The Netherlands on May 17, 1928, and emigrated to Canada in 1959 with his wife
and young daughter, to minister to the Christian Reformed Church in Newmarket, Ont. He served as
minister to Zion Christian Reformed Church in Oshawa, Ont. for 13 years. The next eight years were
spent in Winnipeg, MB serving an inner city church named Hope Centre, where he developed a
holistic approach to ministry that included spiritual guidance, personal counseling, medical care and
legal aid to the downtown core, as well as specialized programming for the developmentally delayed
population.

In Holland Dik earned a Masters of Theology and was ordained as a minister, and in Winnipeg he
obtained a Masters Degree in Marriage and Family Therapy. He practiced both professions for
many years. In 1985 Dik became Regional Coordinator of Chaplaincy for the province of Ontario,
a position he enjoyed until his retirement in 1993. During this time he joined the United Church of
Canada.

After retirement Dik continued to work at, and enjoy, his quiet beautiful cabin property at Lake St.
Peter. He also spent much time playing the organ, a passion he had since childhood, and he was
the regular organist and choir director at Colborne United Church. In 2001 Dik established the Nor-
thumberland Interfaith Coalition, and in 2003 began The Abuse Awareness Project. Martha contin-
ues to follow his vision with her involvement in the End the Silence About Violence organization.

We are so blessed to have lived with Dik, a man of many skills and talents, strong passions, steady
energy, deep wisdom, great love and joy, and a wonderful sense of humour. Even as he now knows
the fullness of the Lord, his life here on earth will not be forgotten.

The funeral was held at Trinity United Church in Cobourg, Ont. on Saturday March 30th. Visitation
was at MacCoubrey Funeral Home in Cobourg and at Trinity United Church preceding the funeral
service. Interment will take place at a later date in Lake St. Peter.

Memorial donations to a charity of one's choice are gratefully received.

Correspondence: M. Habermehl, 138 Tremaine St., Cobourg ON K9A 2Z3

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Houston Christian School was founded in 1962 and is a K-12 school with approximately 100 students. Houston BC is a small town of about 3200 residents. Our community has a strong Christian base and students come mainly from Christian Reformed, Canadian Reformed, Baptist and Pentecostal families. The school is grateful for the solid and stable family character of its education program and marvels at the faithfulness of our God as alumni repeatedly come back and report how positive their experience at our school was. Over the past few years the school has focused intensely on developing more intentional Christian teaching using the Teaching for Transformation format developed by the prairie Christian schools in all curriculum areas. Houston Christian School is an active member of the Society of Christian Schools in BC (SCSBC).

Houston Christian School is accepting applications for a full-time teaching principal / lead administrator commencing August 1, 2013. In the past this principal position was 50% administration and 50% teaching. The Board is open to input on this model and is keenly interested in candidates who will commit to leading development of the school's administrative systems and procedures. The successful candidate will be expected to creatively leverage the strengths of a small school and further strengthen the school's education program and operations to the praise and glory of our God.

The ideal candidate must:

- be a committed Christian
- qualify for BC professional teacher certification
- be dedicated to Christian education
- be able to sign the school's Code of Conduct
- have experience and skill in educational and curricular leadership
- have a minimum of 4-5 years of administrative experience as head teacher, vice principal, or principal
- be committed to professional development. Preference will be given to the candidate who holds or is working towards a Master's degree in Educational Leadership
- have excellent communication abilities and work well with educators, school board, various committee volunteers, and administrative staff
- have solid comprehension and leadership abilities in all school administration and operations
- be able to lead a dedicated group of staff in serving the vision and mission of Houston Christian School

Each application must include:

- an up-to-date resume
- at least 3 professional references including pertinent contact information
- copies of university transcripts
- a written personal philosophy of Christian education and leadership

Closing date: March 15, 2013

Mail or email your application to:

Houston Christian School
Attn: Keith Jaarsma, Board Chair
Box 237 2161 Caledonia Ave.
Houston BC V0J 1Z0

Ph: 250.845.7736 (school office) or
250.845.5230 Keith's day number
250.845.7832 Keith's eve number
Email: kdjarsma@telus.net

The congregation of **River Park Church** (Christian Reformed Church), located in the Canadian Rocky Mountain city of Calgary, Alberta, is seeking to fill the position of

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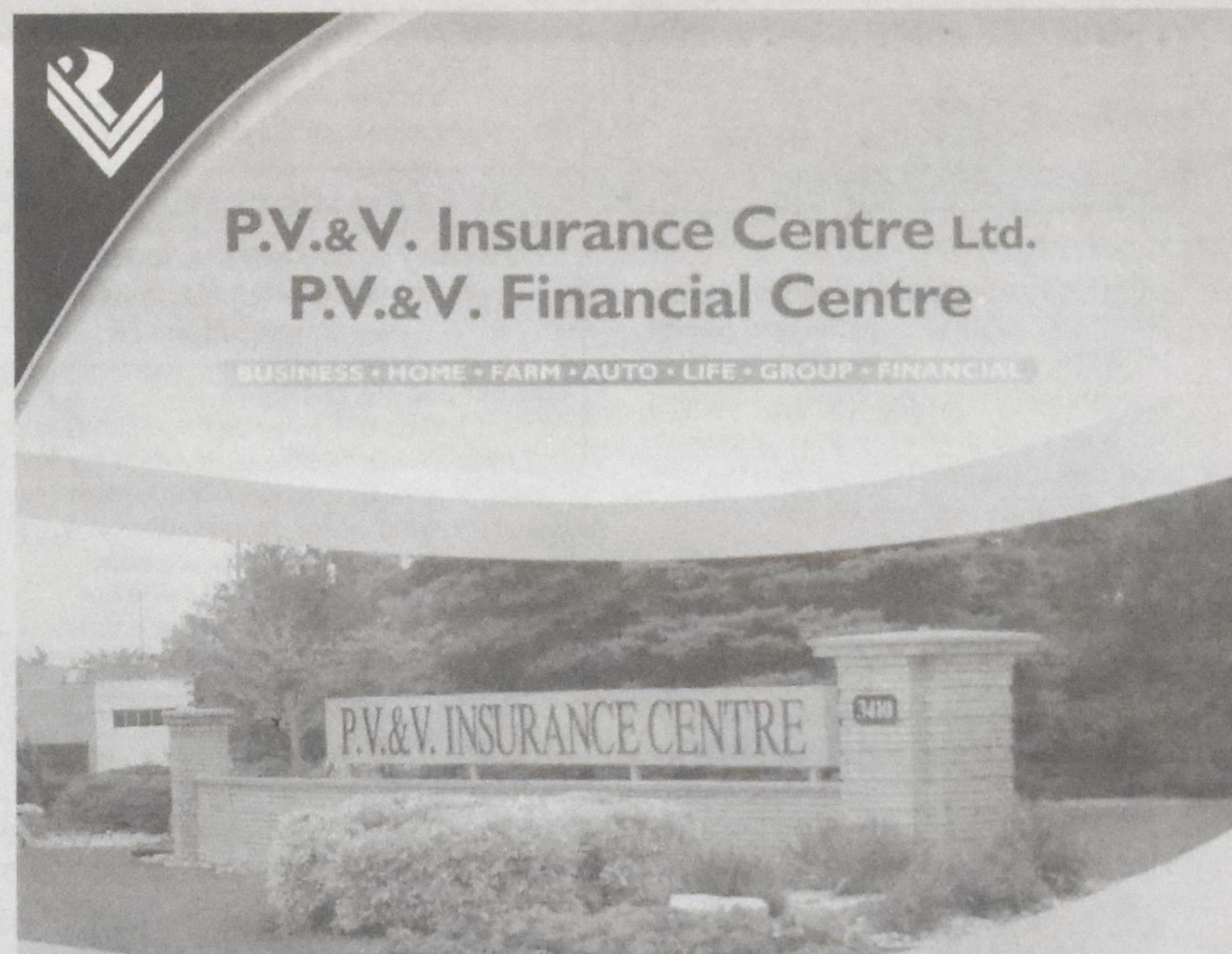
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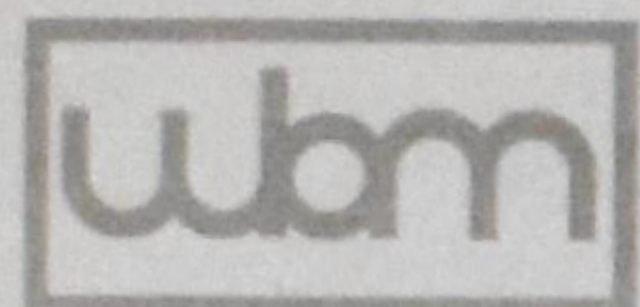
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Apr 6 Dutch Theatre Group presents "Een Bomvol Hotel" Great Lakes Christian College, Beamsville, Ont. 2 pm. See ad Feb 25 issue or Phone 519 424 2985 or email woodstockdutchtheatre@yahoo.ca

Apr 21 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. John Zant- ingh will be preaching. DVDs are available.

Apr 27 Holland Marsh CRC, Ont., is celebrating their 75th anniversary. See ad.

May 31 - June 1 Toronto District Christian School 50th anniversary. See ad or tdchristian.ca



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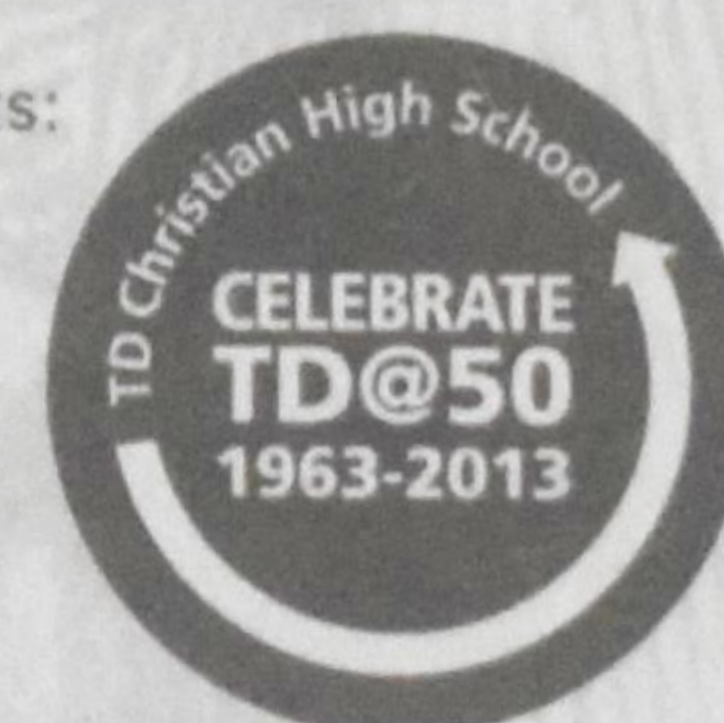
Friday, May 31: See the school in action from 9-3. Watch student
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Saturday, June 1: Connect with friends at 2 events:

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News

Why are Christians such bad tipppers?

A theological defense of paying servers their 15 percent . . . or more

Karen Swallow Prior

If you are a Christian and want to serve Christendom well, you can start by not going out to eat – unless you're willing to love your neighbour the restaurant server as yourself.

February's story of pastor who instead of a tip left a snarky note for her waitress – "I give God 10 percent, why do you get 18?" – made news because of what followed the otherwise commonplace event: a photo of the receipt was posted online and went viral, the server was then fired, and finally, after her stinginess found her out, the pastor issued a public apology.

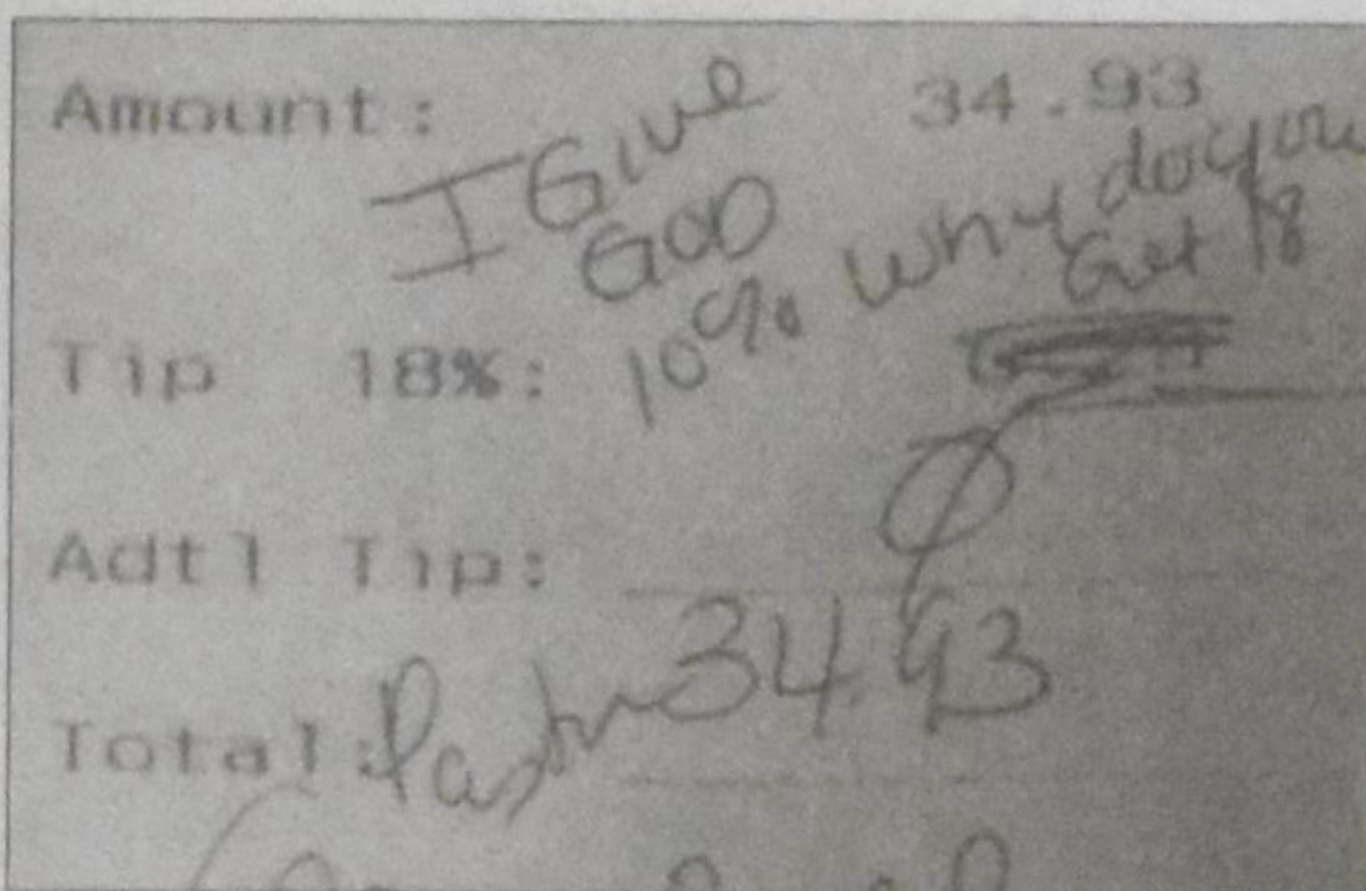
But the initial incident? Ah, that's just the daily special, as anyone working as a restaurant server knows full well.

I experienced this dark underside of Christian culture while working my way through college as a waitress. My earliest waitressing years were at the kind of pancake joints where Christians love to congregate after Sunday morning, Sunday evening and Wednesday evening services. The other servers and I always dreaded these shifts: the after-church crowd came in to "fellowship" more than, you know, *eat*, and that meant pushing together a lot of tables so they could camp out for a long time without buying much more than the endless cup of coffee. Not that any restaurant manager worth her salt would begrudge them that. My fellow servers called them the "Holy Rollers." Knowing there would be little, if any, tip left at the end of their meal, the servers saw the Christians' robust attempts at "friendliness" instead as pushy and arrogant. The memories still pain me now.

Avoid Sunday shift

Decades later, my students who work as servers assure me that little has changed.

One says that in the steak house where she waitressed during college, Sunday lunch was the shift to avoid. Servers with seniority made the new people work it because "church people don't tip, don't control their children, and are really mean when



This photo, posted online, cost an Applebees waitress her job.

you mess up their food," she says. On half a dozen occasions, a Sunday after-church group left her a tract instead of a tip. (Once, it was that tract that looks like money.) A few times, Christian customers told her that she should not be working on Sunday because it was the Lord's Day – while she was waiting on them.

Tipping isn't the only thing that makes some Christian bad witnesses in eating establishments. Alcohol is another. Many American Christians consider abstention from alcohol as a mark of strong faith – but some of these seem also to think that dramatic displays of that abstention in restaurants are a further sign of faithfulness.

One student tells me that when she waitressed, it was common for some customers to put all the wine glasses on their table upside down before a server even arrived there as if to say, "Don't even come NEAR me with that devil juice!"

Another student server tells this story: One Sunday afternoon, I asked a lady, "What can I get you to drink today?" and she looked horrified and said, "I don't drink! I am a Christian, and it is Sunday, and my goodness it is 12:30 in the afternoon!" And after an awkward silence, her husband said, "I'd like a Diet Coke . . ."

Tips aren't donations

There's more at stake here, however, than a few stiffed servers and some funny stories that inflate the sense of superiority of those telling them (present company included).

We know, from study after study, that religious folks out-give the general population time and time again. We know that Christians are among the most benevolent and philan-

thropic demographic groups. Something is at stake here more than mere stinginess.

Perhaps there are some simple explanations. Times are tough. Eating out is expensive. But if diners can't afford all of the expected expenses of eating out, they should go to an establishment they can afford, or not go out at all. Or perhaps in some cases, it's ignorance. Maybe

some folks don't know that the minimum wage for servers is lower than for everyone else, or that the percentage for tips increases like everything else, or that the government collects income tax on tips, whether those tips are received or not. Tips aren't donations. Tips are payment for services rendered.

But my hunch is that what's really at the root of the bad-Christian-customer problem is bad theology.

It goes back, I suspect, to the unfortunate sway Gnosticism has had on Christianity since its early years. Gnosticism is a dualistic worldview that separates the secular and the sacred, the physical and the spiritual, elevating the spiritual and denouncing matter as evil. Under this view, giving one's money to support a Christian mission is seen as good, but spending money on earthly pleasures – like eating out – while not necessarily bad, isn't quite as good.

This Gnostic influence on the church can be seen in much more insidious ways than in poor restaurant behaviour (for example, in thinking of the role of pastor as a "higher calling" than that of, say, an accountant), but spotting and correcting such heresies often begins with the small things.

I don't think that Paul had servers in mind when he exhorted believers, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God," but the principle certainly does apply. Those who are to represent Christ in all they do should remember that includes paying the cheque – in total – at the end of the meal.

Karen Swallow Prior, Ph.D., is professor of English and Chair of the English and modern languages department at Liberty University in

Lynchburg, Virginia. This article first appeared online at hermeneutics.com, a division of Christianity Today. Used by permission of Christianity Today, Carol Stream, IL 60188.



Odds and Trends

A digital deal

The 2013 Alberta budget, explained so adroitly by Mike Wevers on page one, is intended to address the so-called bitumen bubble, but made (not surprisingly) no mention of Bitcoins. Ignoring this digital currency probably bugged one Edmonton resident, who has put his house up for sale for \$400,000, or 5,613 Bitcoins. He claims he'd prefer the latter.

Taylor More, a former currency trader, trusts Bitcoins (worth \$72.50 each) over the Canadian dollar; he thinks they have a brighter future.

"I have a few ventures that I'm working on that involve Bitcoins," More said. "I thought this might help Bitcoin gain some ground." Online shoppers can already spend Bitcoins at websites like Amazon, ebay and Toys'R'Us (among others), through a third-party called Bitcointrading.com. According to an ABC News report, Walmart now accepts Bitcoins directly.

Winning title

"Don't judge a book by its cover" is one of those warnings we all ignore. And for a British trade magazine hosting a recent contest, judging book covers was its job. The contest gave out an award for Oddest Book Title of the Year.

Goblinproofing One's Chicken Coop took first prize, with a craft manual called *How Tea Cosies Changed the World* a close runner-up. *How to Sharpen Pencils* made the shortlist.

Contest coordinator Philip Stone says the award might seem silly, but it immediately boosts the winning book's sales. He points out that many bestsellers owe their success, in part, to their odd titles, citing *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* as examples.

Unlimited vacancy

A Swedish business called the Faktum Hotel now offers "rooms" that give customers a taste of homelessness. For \$15, you can be directed to a mattress under a bridge, a sleeping bag in a public park or a floor lined with newspapers in an abandoned mill. It's been a cold winter in Sweden, so very few hotel patrons have "stayed" the whole night.



Just a short stroll from the city's downtown.

Aaron Israelson, the project's organizer, says his "primary mission is to spread the word about the homeless situation in this city." The "rooms" were set up by asking his homeless contacts where they slept. Clever advertising has helped: "A stay at the Skeppsbron wharf assures you a waterside vista in the heart of the city."

This may not exactly be the "face-to-face encounter" with the poor that Ron Sider envisions for Christians on page two, but it's an interesting place to start. And you don't have to travel to Sweden, either! Lock yourself out one night and experience homelessness right in your own neighbourhood. Matthew 25 may take on new relevance.

—Angela Reitsma Bick



All wait staff know that "church people don't tip."